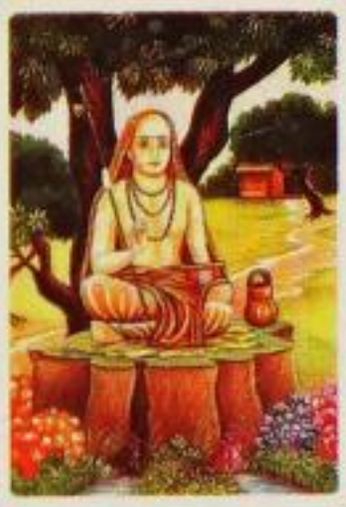
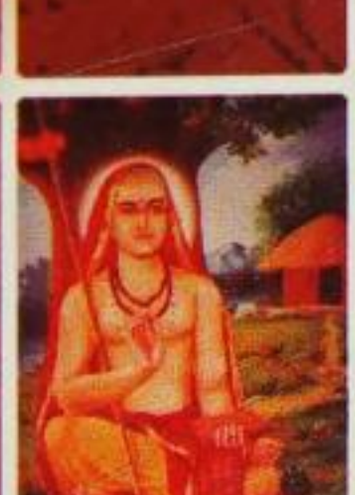
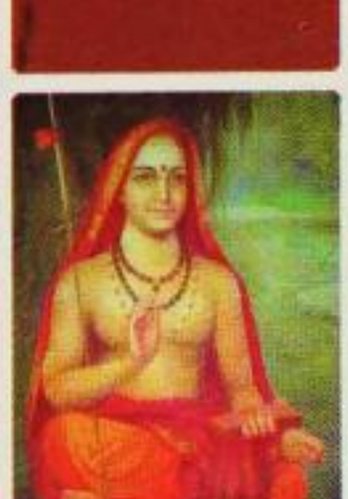
SRI SHANKARACHARYA

Life and Philosophy

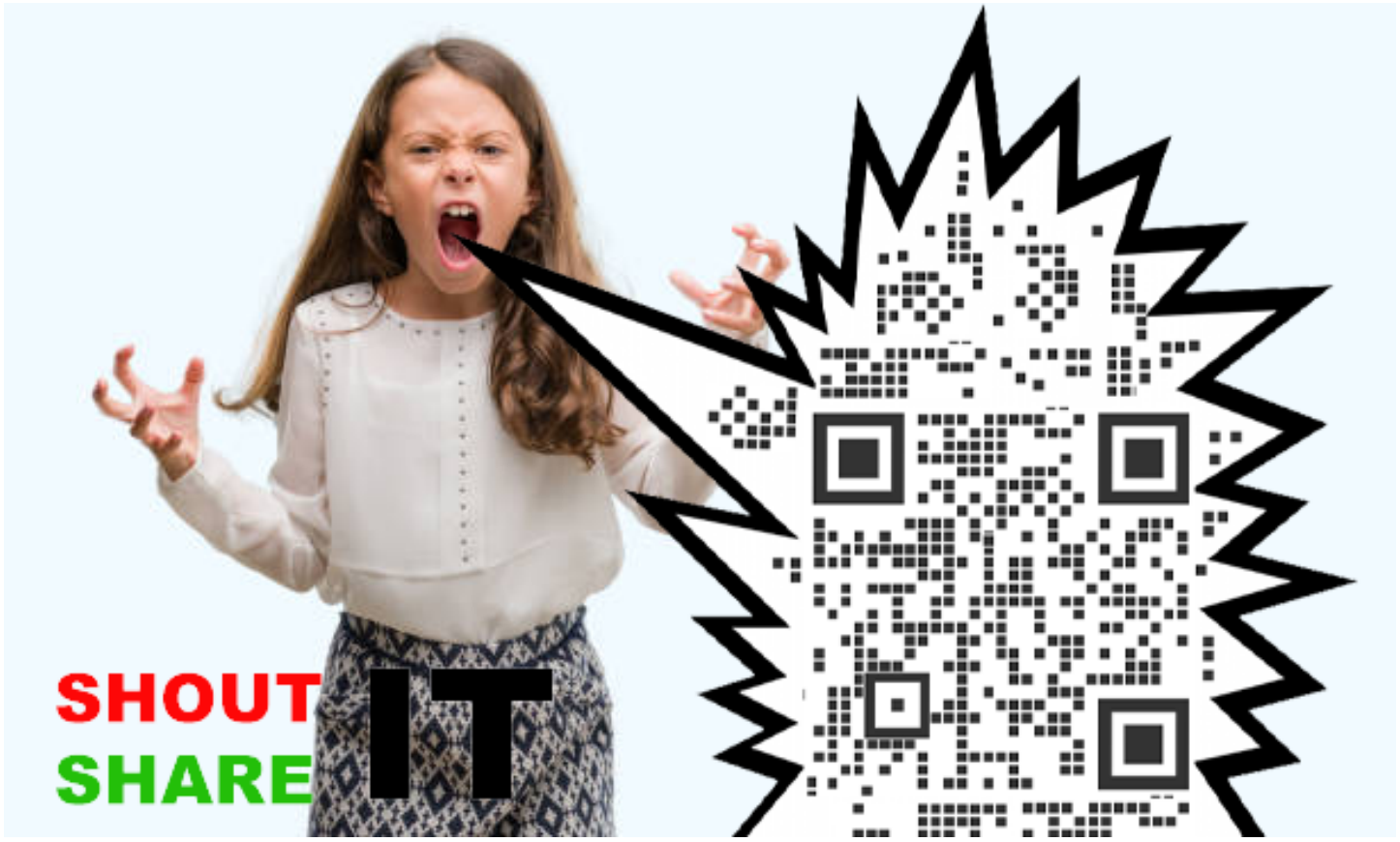
An Elucidative & Reconciliatory Interpretation







Swami Mukhyananda


SHOUT
SHARE
IT

WHAT EXACTLY is meant by 'Maya'? Is the world unreal? Does Shankara negate the idea of God?

These questions and many others about the Advaita Philosophy as propounded by Shankaracharya are clearly addressed in this straightforward book. The author's liberal approach and careful explanation of key concepts makes this an invaluable book for students of Vedanta and philosophy, spiritual seekers and sadhakas, and devotees of Sri Shankaracharya.

SHANKARA was a great towering personality who, within the course of a short life of thirty-two years, brought about a thorough revolution in the social, religious, spiritual, and philosophical life and thought of India. He laid the foundations of modern Hinduism on a composite, comprehensive, and all-inclusive universal basis. He had such a brilliant mind, scientific viewpoint, and rational approach that he appeals to the people of today. He appears just as modern, in many respects, as if he were living today, for he was concerned with eternal universal thoughts. Some of the special problems that he dealt with in those days are here even today, and the solutions that he suggested are applicable even now. That is why he appeals to all modern people as well.

Shankara was also a brilliant writer. His Sanskrit is mellifluous, and at the same time very forceful, impressive, and direct. His commentaries on the Upanishads,

continued on back flap

D 15 ت

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/isbn_817505283

SRI SHANKARACHARYA

LIFE AND PHILOSOPHY

An Elucidative & Reconciliatory

Interpretation by

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

Advaita Ashrama

(PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT)

5 DEHI ENTALLY ROAD • KOLKATA 700 014

Published by
Swami Bodhasarananda, President
Advaita Ashrama
Mayavati, Champawat 262 524
Uttaranchal, INDIA
from its Publication Department, Kolkata
www.advaitaashrama.org
mail@advaitaashrama.org

© Advaita Ashrama, 2006
All Rights Reserved
First published in 1987 by Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady
Fourth Edition: May 2006
3M3C

ISBN 81-7505-283-x

Typeset in Adobe Minion Pro
Printed in India at
Trio Process
Kolkata 700 014

Contents

Publisher's Note vi
Author's Preface to the First Edition ix
Key to Transliteration xiii
List of Abbreviations xiv

PART ONE

Life, Works, and the Mission of Sri Shankaracharya

I. Life of Sri Shankara

1. Introduction 3
2. The Date and Times of Sri Shankara 3
3. A Short Life Sketch 5

II. Works of Sri Shankara

1. Introduction 12
2. Works of Sri Shankara 13
3. Sri Shankara's Approach 15
4. Sri Shankara's Methodology 18

III. Mission of Sri Shankara

1. The Socio-Spiritual Conditions at the time of Sri Shankara 23
2. His Triple Scientific Methodology 27
3. Reason Vis-à-Vis Revelation (Scripture) 28
4. A Harmonizing Scientific Philosophy of the Secular and Spiritual, Physical and Metaphysical 31
5. Universal Spiritual Religion 36
6. A Great Nation-Builder: Reconstruction of Religion and Society 39

PART TWO

The Philosophy of Sri Shankaracharya: An Elucidative and Reconciliatory Interpretation

1. The Task Before Sri Shankara 44
2. The Questions He Faced 46
3. The Guiding Principles of His Approach 47
4. Two Standpoints on Reality 48
5. The Absolute or Noumenal Reality 49
6. The Relative or Phenomenal (Empirical) Reality 51
7. The Empirical Personality—Its Bondage and Liberation 53
8. Maya: The Principle of Relativity 54
9. The Basis of our Empirical Activities 57
10. Our Empirical Knowledge and Superimposition 59

11. *Avidyā*, *Īśvara*, and *Jīva* 64
12. Is the Postulate of Maya Necessary? 65
13. Can We Give Up *Īśvara* and the Universe? 69
14. Brahman and *Īśvara* are the Same Reality 71
15. Empirically Different Views of *Īśvara-Jīva-Jagat* Acceptable 72
16. The Triangle of *Īśvara-Jīva-Jagat* is Relatively Eternal: It can be Transcended, not Eliminated 74
17. *Īśvara-bhakti-mukti* 76
18. *Karma-mārga* 78
19. *Jñāna-mārga* 79
20. Significance of '*Jñānāt eva Mokṣaḥ*' 80

21. *Jīvanmukta*: Liberated-while-living 83
22. The Aim of Philosophy—Discovery of Truṭh 83
23. Disciplines for the Seeker of the Highest Truth 84
24. Graduated Paths to the Highest Truth 86
25. Attitude Towards Karṃa and Bhakti 87

26. The Great Twofold Achievement of Sri Shankara 89
27. The Concept of *Mithyā* 90
28. Grades of Empirical Realities and Unrealities 92
29. The Status of the Universe 96
a. *Ajāta-vāda*
b. Sri Shankara's system of *Vivarta-vāda*
c. *Sṛiṣṭi-dṛiṣṭi-* and *Dṛiṣṭi-sṛiṣṭi-vādas*
d. An alternate view
30. The Phenomenal *Īśvara* 107

31. What is Sublated? 108
32. Standard of Judgement and Correlation 109
33. Does the Transcendental View Affect Empirical Life? 111
34. Can the Non-personal Brahman Serve as Personal *Īśvara*? 114
35. Is Brahman Superior, or *Īśvara*? 119
36. Duality is not Final 122
37. The Character of Sri Shankara's Philosophy 124
38. Contributions of Sri Shankara to Religio-philosophical Thought 126
39. Advantages of the Advaitic View-point 129
40. Conclusion 132

Appendix A Note on Maya and Its Cognates 134

Appendix B A Comprehensive List of Works Attributed to Sri Shankara 137

Appendix C Swami Vivekananda on Sri Shankara 142

Appendix D Great Assurance by Sri Shankara 144

Publisher's Note

SRI SHANKARACHARYA, an exponent of Advaita Vedanta, is one of the greatest philosophers of India. He was a brilliant thinker and vigorous debater, who reconciled the conflicting sects prevalent in his time, and refuted the harmful, negative systems of thought, thus reviving the Sanatana Dharma and rescuing the foundering Vedic culture; and he placed the Vedanta philosophy on unshakeable scriptural and rational foundations. A careful study of his life and philosophy will reveal Shankara's immense contribution to world thought, and dispel the myths and wrong ideas still held about him.

"Shankaracharya had caught the rhythm of the Vedas, the national cadence," said Swami Vivekananda. That rhythm, that cadence, still beats in India's heart; Shankara helps us to catch it, and to sing it ourselves. Sri Ramakrishna said, "One cannot teach men without the command of God. After attaining Knowledge, Sankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach humankind." That 'ego of Knowledge' manifested his unparalleled commentaries on the *Prasthānatraya*, forever establishing the Advaita Vedanta as the pinnacle of the religious and philosophical thought of the world. At the same time, his deep devotion similarly manifested myriad hymns which remain essential to India's devotional life. His teachings are yet vital to humanity's ongoing spiritual regeneration.

This book has already undergone three editions, in 1987, 1998, and 2005, all published by Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady, indicating its popularity. We wish to express our gratitude to Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady, for making the copyright of the book over to us, and trust that the publication of this fourth edition, thoroughly revised by the author, will be welcomed by scholars and general readers alike.

May 2006,
Kolkata

PUBLISHER

Publisher's Note to the First Edition

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA, of Belur Math—the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission near Calcutta—has attempted in this small book to interpret Sri Shankara's philosophy in a way intelligible and acceptable to modern scholars. The Swami was an Acharya at the Monastic Probationers' Training Centre at Belur Math for about ten years from 1976, where he taught some of the works of Acharya Shankara. With this advantage, he has made a rather difficult voyage through the voluminous and profound works of Sri Shankara.

No systematic and authentic commentary on the Upanishads and other texts of Vedanta is available prior to Sri Shankara, except the *Kārikā* on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* by Śrī Gauḍapādācārya. Sri Shankara, through his *bhāṣyā*s on the *prasthānatraya*, synthesized and co-ordinated all the seemingly varying or contradictory passages in them regarding *para-* and *apara-Brahman*, *Īśvara*, *jīva*, *jagat*, *bandha*, *mokṣa*, etc.

The merit of the author of this present book lies in his greatly successful attempt in bringing together the scattered ideas of Sri Shankara on various religio-philosophical topics within a brief compass in a scientific spirit, reconciling them to the other systems of Vedanta. The author has substantiated his points by quoting from Sri Shankara's own words as well as from the scriptures, with copious notes and references. Well known Shankarite philosophers like Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan and Swami Achalanandaji of Mysore, have also commended this work. The two appendices by the author supplement the work and throw light on the great life of Sri Shankara and his contribution to the socio-spiritual regeneration of India and the philosophical enlightenment of mankind as to the Oneness of Life, Religion, and Reality. We have no hesitation in presenting this book before the earnest seekers of Truth and stu-

dents of Sri Shankara's unifying Advaita philosophy.

Swami Mukhyanandaji has entrusted to us the publication of this book as a mark of his love for the publisher and his devotion to the birthplace of Sri Shankara. We express our gratitude to him for giving the copyright of the book to this Ashrama and for contributing towards the cost of its publication.

12 January 1987
Kalady

Swami Gangananda
President

Author's Preface to the First Edition

THIS BOOK WAS not planned to be written. On 1st May 1966, we had given a talk at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, on Acharya Shankara on the occasion of his birthday celebration. A devotee who had attended the talk gave us a shorthand report of it expressing his satisfaction and appreciation, saying that his doubts standing for many years were cleared. On the basis of this report, with some editing and additions, footnotes, etc., we contributed an article entitled *Acharya Shankara and His Contribution to Indian Spiritual Regeneration* to the *Vedanta Kesari*, Madras, which was published in the May and June 1978 issues. It has been appended at the end of this book after some revision. [Note: The article was incorporated in the text in the second edition.] Around this time and earlier too, we had occasion to read and hear several, what we felt were, unjustified criticisms and ignorant misrepresentations of Shankara's philosophy and views. To answer these and to put the record straight, in the light of our understanding, we prepared a paper for publication in the *Vedanta Kesari* in continuation of our above article. But the management wanted only short articles and did not entertain this long article.

However, in due course, the paper was developed further into a book, as we came across other types of criticism and questioning and also several new ideas occured to us while studying and teaching some of Shankara's works. As it was not possible to recast the entire book, some of these ideas were given in the form of footnotes at relevant places. Since some of the footnotes were long, and it would be inconvenient to print them on relevant pages, they are appended at the end along with references to quotations, though it would have facilitated reference if they were readily available below the text. [Note: the footnotes were shifted to the relevant pages in the second edition.]

But another consideration also decided the issue. The book is not intended only for scholars, but also for the general intelligent public who wish to know something of Shankara's life and thought without going deeply into technicalities. Hence they can read on without the notes and references also. As much as is necessary for them has been given in the body of the text. For this reason, that is, to serve the general reader, we have adopted the usual English spellings for Sanskrit words, along with the use of diacritical marks for the benefit of scholars. A separate note will explain the system, which we have adopted for our other books also with good results. [In the present edition, the international system is adopted.]

Though we have tried to answer the criticisms of and objections to Shankara's views as understood by the critics by presenting them in the proper perspective, our approach has been reconciliatory and not polemical, as advocated by Swami Vivekananda, and as is the need of the times—when we have to consolidate the whole range of Hindu thought to meet the world-wide challenges from scientific and socialistic materialism, dry rationalism, and narrow dogmatism of alien religions. As such, though we have tried generally to keep to the traditional views, whenever a more suitable presentation has been possible, justified by the original texts and reason, we have adopted it. Hence the apt title of the book *Acharya Shankara: An Interpretation* (*Elucidatory and Reconciliatory*). Generally, the treatment is a fresh interpretation in a broader context, with modern illustrations whenever possible, to render Shankara's thought dynamically relevant to the present times. Though it may differ here and there from the strictly orthodox traditional view-point, the work is not written in a spirit of challenging the orthodox view of deep scholars, but to expound Shankara's ideas, in the light of our understanding, in a simple non-technical language understandable to the intelligent reader interested in the thought and achievements of the genius of Shankara.

However, to keep in tune with the orthodox view, though not strictly in line with it, the manuscript has been shown to the late Dr.

T.M.P. Mahadevan, who was well versed in Sri Shankara's thought, and to Swami Achalanandaji of Mysore, whose learned translation, with introduction and notes, of *Siddhānta Bindu* of Madhusudan Sarasvati has been published by Mysore University. Both of them have gone through the work carefully, and we acknowledge our gratefulness to these learned scholars, who have appreciated the work and found it presentable and useful. Dr. Mahadevan wrote: "I have enjoyed reading the paper along with notes. You have covered many of the aspects of Advaita and answered the usual charges levelled against it." Swami Achalanandaji wrote: "I have gone through the manuscript of *Acharya Shankara: An Interpretation* with care. In general the book is well written and is a welcome addition to the literature available in English on the subject. It can help many persons to an understanding of the doctrine of Advaita. . . . The explanations and clarifications given are quite clear and consistent." They both were kind enough to make some relevant observations and suggestions as well, which have been suitably incorporated in the book, changes effected where necessary. Hence, we feel assured that no conscious violence has been done to the orthodox view and only the cause of Shankara's thought is furthered by this fresh interpretation.

A short paper on the *Works of Sri Shankara*, and another on *The Status of the Universe* (Published in the *Prabuddha Bharata* in September 1982) have also been appended at the end, besides the one mentioned earlier, to supplement the work. [Note: these also were incorporated into the text in the second edition.]

It is indeed a good augury that the book is being published by Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady, situated close to the house in which Sri Shankara was born. We are thankful to Swami Gananandaji, president of the ashrama, for kindly undertaking to publish the work. We hope the book will be found useful and welcomed both by scholars and general readers.

Swami Achalanandaji concluded his comments on the manuscript of the book with his good wishes to the author: "I hope He

is keeping you in good health and cheer to perform His work of teaching and interpreting Sri Shankara's Vedanta, which He has entrusted to you." Though we do not consciously feel that any such task has been entrusted to us by the Supreme Being, nor that we have done much in this direction, we do bear great love and admiration for Sri Shankara's luminous, compassionate, towering personality and versatile genius, and seek to place at his blessed holy feet a few fragrant colourful flowers plucked from his own beautiful garden of rich and profound thoughts, in reverential homage, on this his sacred birthday.

Om Śāntiḥ, Śāntiḥ, Śāntiḥ

Sri Shankara Jayantī
Belur Math on Gaṅgā (Kolkata)
25 April 1985

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

Key to Transliteration and Pronunciation

IN THIS BOOK, Devanagari characters are transliterated according to the scheme adopted by the International Congress of Orientalists at Athens in 1912. Well-known Sanskrit words which have entered the English language are printed without diacritical marks.

		Sounds like			*Sounds like*
अ	*a*	o in s*o*n	ड	*ḍ*	d in bir*d* (retroflex)
आ	*ā*	a in m*a*ster	ढ	*ḍh*	dh in go*dh*ood
इ	*i*	i in *i*f	ण	*ṇ*	n in u*n*der
ई	*ī*	ee in feel	त	*t*	t in *t*o (dental)
उ	*u*	u in f*u*ll	थ	*th*	th in *th*umb
ऊ	*ū*	oo in b*oo*t	द	*d*	th in *th*en
ऋ	*ṛ*	between ru and ri	ध	*dh*	theh in brea*the h*ere
ए	*e*	a in ev*a*de	न	*n*	n in *n*o
ऐ	*ai*	y in m*y*	प	*p*	p in *p*ot
ओ	*o*	o in *o*h	फ	*ph*	ph in loo*p h*ole
औ	*au*	ow in n*ow*	ब	*b*	b in *b*at
क	*k*	k in *k*aiser	भ	*bh*	bh in a*bh*or
ख	*kh*	ckh in bloc*kh*ead	म	*m*	m in *m*an
ग	*g*	g in *g*o	य	*y*	y in *y*es
घ	*gh*	gh in log-*h*ut	र	*r*	r in *r*ust
ङ	*ṅ*	n in u*n*cle	ल	*l*	l in *l*ump
च	*c*	ch in *ch*uckle	व	*v*	v in a*v*ert
छ	*ch*	chh in cat*ch h*im	श	*ś*	sh in *sh*ip
ज	*j*	j in *j*ug	ष	*ṣ*	sh in *sh*ow
झ	*jh*	dgeh in he*dgeh*og	स	*s*	s in *s*un
ञ	*ñ*	n in si*n*ge	ह	*h*	h in *h*ome
ट	*ṭ*	t in a*r*t (retroflex)	ं	*ṁ*	m in ki*m*
ठ	*ṭh*	th in an*t-h*ill	ः	*ḥ*	h in a*h*a

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ait. Up.	Aitareya Upaniṣad
Bhā.	Bhāṣya
Bṛh. Up.	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
Br. Sū.	Brahma Sūtra
Cha. Up.	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
Mān. Up.	Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad
Muṇ. Up.	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad
Śve. Up.	Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad
Tai. Up.	Taittirīya Upaniṣad
Up.	Upaniṣad
Vivek.	Vivekacūḍāmaṇi

Part One

Life, Works, and the Mission of Sri Shankaracharya

Chapter One

Life of Sri Shankara

1. Introduction

INDIA IS FAMOUS for producing great spiritual personalities and philosophers from the most ancient times, and Acharya Shankara is a very outstanding one among them. Even within the brief span of a life of thirty-two years, this wonderful young genius accomplished so much by way of reinstatement of spiritual values and regeneration of society, under the auspices of a profound and comprehensive philosophy based on Vedic authority, that we stand amazed at his achievements. He was a prodigy from childhood, and it is said that even at a very early age he had learnt most of the Vedas and other scriptures by heart. By his early teens he had practically mastered all that was to be learnt in those days, not only the scriptural and philosophical literature in Sanskrit, but also the various sciences that were then current. He was also an adept in spiritual practices and realized the greatness of the Vedic religion and philosophy and their immense possibilities for humankind.

2. The Date and Times of Sri Shankara

If we are to realize the greatness and genius of Shankara, it is very necessary that we should have a glimpse into the times in which he lived and the context in which he worked, for every great man works in the cultural milieu of his surroundings and tries to solve the problems then facing society.

The date of Shankara is still a matter of controversy. It is the consensus of opinion that he lived after Bhagavan Buddha. The dates assigned to him vary from the sixth century BC to the eighth century AD. The traditional date is *kaliyuga* 2593 or 509 BC. It has been

generally held by several modern Orientalists that he lived between AD 788 and 820. Professor Telang, however, on the basis of a reference to Pūrṇa Varman, in the *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* of Shankara, whom he (Telang) identifies with the Buddhist King of Magadha, holds that he must have lived in the sixth century AD.

Whatever may have been the exact date, it is clear that he lived at a time when Vedic religion faced a critical situation brought about by quarrelling sects and by fanatics with unholy zeal and degrading practices. Buddhism, at one time the widespread dominant dharma, had enmeshed itself in its subtle negativistic philosophies on the thought plane and was fast gliding down the path of degeneracy on the moral plane. The development of Buddhist 'Tantricism' with its various '*yānas*', such as *vajra-yāna* and its offshoots—*sahaja-yāna*, *mantra-yāna*, and *kālacakra-yāna*, and the secret conclaves based on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* and other texts, are witness to this state of affairs. The Vedic religion, too, was at its lowest ebb due to the supremacy of Buddhism. Its noble unifying principles were forgotten, and there was a welter of views in society. Various systems of philosophy had sprung up, advocating their own views of life and Reality, which were mostly partial and sectarian, based upon mere emotions or intellectual cogitations, and not on experiential Truth. On the orthodox side, the *Sāṁkhya-Yoga* and *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* propounded their own systems of thought entirely based upon reasoning, paying only lip homage to the *śrutis*. The *Mīmāṁsā* confined itself to the *Karma-kāṇḍa* of the Vedas, interpreted the *śruti* wholly in terms of ritualistic karma, and turned the gaze of man towards enjoyment, earthly and heavenly.

Besides these philosophical schools, there were religious schools with various novel or bizarre notions and practices, such as the *Tāntrikas* and *Kaulas*, the *Kāpālikas*, *Kālamukhas*, *Pāśupatas*, *Pāñcarātras*, *Gāṇapatyas*, and the *Sauras*. There were also the heterodox atheistic Jainas and Bauddhas, and the materialistic *Bārhaspatyas*—better known as *Lokāyatikas* or *Cārvākas* because of their hedonistic attitude. All these, pulling in different directions,

had split the Vedic society into an incoherent congeries of conflicting groups without being co-ordinated by a master ideal.

The Truth that will liberate us from the imprisonment of our little, limited personalities and integrate us into the Spiritual Infinite, that will make us realize our true divine nature and our oneness with all creation, nay with Existence itself, the Truth that is a blessing to the individual and society in every way, was lost sight of by those philosophies and sects. While the *Mīmāmsā* tended to increase the desire for enjoyment, the *Sāṁkhya-Yoga* led to an exclusive existence away from society, and the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* bound its adherents in the net of logical subtleties and empiricism. We have already referred to the conditions brought about by the self-stultifying, ultra-subtle, negativistic Buddhist system of thought, in spite of the grand moral precepts preached by Bhagavan Buddha. While the *Lokāyatika*s were hedonistic in attitude, seeking pleasure by any means and catering to the comforts of the body, the Jainas went to the other extreme and advocated the mortification of the body. National well-being needed a genius who could counter the effects of all these mutually conflicting, partial views of life and Reality, and reinstate the healthy, integral view of life and Reality of the Vedas and the Vedanta, as was done by Sri Krishna in the *Gītā* before. There was an imperative necessity of establishing unity in the midst of conflicting diversity if society was to be cohesive and all its members were to progress towards the spiritual goal in a systematic manner. It was at this juncture that the Time Spirit threw up Shankara, and he appeared on the scene like a saviour to accomplish this great task by his work on the social and spiritual planes.

3. A Short Life Sketch

Shankara was born, according to the current tradition, on *Vaiśākha śuddha pañcamī* (around May) in the village Kalady near Ernakulam in Kerala. His father was Śivaguru and his mother Āryāmbā, both of whom were great devotees of Shiva. They were childless and had prayed for a son. Hence the child was named Shankara

(Accomplisher of Peace and Good), a name of Shiva. They belonged to the highly orthodox *Naṁbūdiri Brāhmaṇa* sect of *Kṛṣṇa-Yajur-Veda, Taittirīya śākhā*. Shankara had his early Sanskrit education in the village in the usual way. He displayed uncommon precocity from childhood itself. It is said that at a very tender age, he had studied *kāvyas* and Puranas and soon blossomed into a full-fledged scholar. When he was about seven, his father passed away. His mother had his *upanayaṇa* (sacred thread) ceremony conducted and sent him to the *Gurukula* (Vedic teacher's academy) for initiation into the Vedas and Vedanta. With his gift of insight and intuition, Shankara mastered their import very quickly, and also studied the other current systems of philosophy and thought. His prodigious learning and keen insight into philosophical questions was acclaimed by scholars, and his fame reached the ears of the king of the land as well. The king offered him great honour and wealth. Shankara was not only a great scholar, but was born with the burning renunciation of Shiva and was established in Self-knowledge. Worldly honours and wealth held no charm for him.

A fascinating story is told of Shankara as a brahmacharin. While once going out on his round of holy begging, he stood outside a small hut and uttered the traditional call to the housewife for holy alms (*bhikṣā*), preceded by the Lord's name: *"Om Nārāyaṇa Hari! Bhavatī bhikṣāṁ dehi."* The lady of the house, an extremely poor old woman, felt deeply her inability to give anything. Finally, she could find only an *āmalaka* (berry of the Emblic Myrobalan) fruit which she had kept for medicinal use, and she came out with tearful eyes and placed it with all sincerity and devotion in Shankara's begging-bowl (*bhikṣā pātra*) and blessed him: "May your self-knowledge shine like the *āmalaka* in one's palm (*karatala-āmalakavat*)." It is an expression used in philosophical and spiritual circles for clear and vivid knowledge and realization free from all doubts, being directly perceived without any intervening obstructions, like the *āmalaka* in one's palm. Realizing the situation, and deeply touched at heart, Shankara prayed to the Goddess of wealth (Mahālakṣmī),

and soon the woman was relieved of her poverty. It is said her courtyard was filled with a shower of golden *āmalakas*. It is surmised that the poor woman was the disguised Sarasvatī Herself (Goddess of learning and wisdom). The incident is interpreted to symbolize that Shankara was to work for the resuscitation of the twofold Vedic dharma consisting of *abhyudaya* (secular welfare) and *niḥśreyasa* (spiritual *Summum Bonum*).

Shankara's great compassionate heart was filled with an intense urge to bring about a new state of things in the country. For the accomplishment of this task supreme self-sacrifice and dedication were necessary. He had to make a difficult choice: on the one hand, there was his great love for his poor widowed mother; he was the only son. On the other hand, the call of dharma was irresistible. One may compare it with a similar situation which Swami Vivekananda faced. Like him, Shankara decided to renounce personal worldly considerations and dedicate himself fully to the upliftment of the country and its dharma (*deśa-dharma*).

Shankara was around sixteen when he returned from the *Gurukula*, and proposals for his marriage were being entertained by his mother. But, as we saw, Shankara had developed an intense desire to renounce the world and become a sannyasin. He was determined to dedicate his life entirely to resuscitating the Vedic dharma and purifying society of all harmful accretions. But his mother would not allow him to take to sannyasa.

However, an extraordinary event secured him the mother's consent. Some say that the loving and compassionate son, to soften the sorrow and psychological anguish of his mother, resorted to a ruse with a double meaning to get her permission for his renunciation. One day, the mother and son went to the nearby river for a bath as usual. As Shankara was bathing, he called out to his mother in fright, as it were, that a crocodile had caught hold of his leg and was dragging him into the deep waters; and he pleaded with her to grant him permission to take *āpat sannyāsa* (emergency ordination without rituals) before he passed away, and so fulfil his intense

desire and last wish. The mother in this crisis, of course, would not hesitate and at once gave her consent with the fond hope that she might see him alive even as a sannyasin. (It had been predicted by famous astrologers that he would face death at sixteen. She must have thought that sannyasa being one's dying to worldly life, he might be miraculously saved by the grace of Shiva to whom she prayed.) The miracle did happen, as the crocodile (attachment to worldly life symbolized by the crocodile of *mahā-moha-grāha*) suddenly left and disappeared and Shankara emerged from the water unscathed as a declared sannyasin. The mother, too, was filled with a mixed feeling of happiness and sorrow, happy that her son was alive, and sorry because now, as a sannyasin, he could not and would not live with her.

Shankara consoled his mother, and promising that he would be by her side in her last moments, wended his way to the ashrama of Śrī Govinda Bhagavatpāda on the banks of the Narmada. Govinda Bhagavatpāda was a prominent disciple of the famous Śrī Gauḍapādācārya, who had written the erudite and subtle philosophical work *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* establishing the Advaita Vedanta as against Buddhistic thought. Govinda Bhagavatpāda himself had become well known as a great teacher of Advaita Vedanta and a man of Self-realization. He was very happy to have such a brilliant disciple as Shankara and formally initiated him into the holy order of Vedic sannyasa. It is believed that it was Guru Govinda who taught Shankara the profound philosophy of Advaita and directed him to write a philosophical commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras*, known also as the *Brahma Sūtras*, then interpreted in diverse theological ways.

Taking leave of his guru after a discipleship of about four years, Shankara travelled from place to place and arrived at Varanasi, which was a great centre of learning and philosophy, where one had to establish one's credentials before preaching a new doctrine or philosophy. Very soon he began to attract intelligent pupils and disciples from various quarters. Among them was a brahmana

youth by name Sunanda, who came from the Chola kingdom in the South and later on became one of his specially endeared disciples under the name Padmapāda. There were two other brilliant youths who later joined the fold of Shankara's disciples and came to be known as Hastāmalaka and Toṭaka or Ānandagiri. At Varanasi, Shankara started writing his important major commentaries, though he may have written some of his minor works earlier. It is not clear in what order he wrote them, but, according to some, his first commentary was on *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*. It is but natural that several minor works (*prakaraṇa-granthas*) on different topics of Vedanta must have been written by him before he proceeded to write his profound commentaries on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the major Upanishads, and the *Brahma Sūtras*, which have become known as the *prasthānatraya* of Vedanta since then. The story goes that Śrī Vyāsa himself, the reputed author of the *Brahma Sūtras*, came to Shankara disguised as an old man and challenged him on several interpretations made in his commentary to test him. Although Shankara successfully answered Vyāsa, the old man proved to be a terrible opponent, and finally, being fully satisfied, Vyāsa revealed himself and blessed Shankara. It is evident that the story is an invention to hold up the greatness of the *bhāṣya* of Shankara. It also reveals that his great fresh commentary was not accepted without serious challenges.

Another important anecdote relates to his meeting at Varanasi a *caṇḍāla* (outcaste) with his dogs. Shankara's Advaita doctrine, which preaches the one divine Self in all, irrespective of caste or creed, high or low, man or beast, male or female, had become well known all around to one and all, even to low caste people. Shankara was going with his disciples to have their daily bath in the holy Ganga. Meeting the *caṇḍāla* on the way, Shankara's disciples asked him to clear off the road for him to pass, as was the practice with the orthodox. The *caṇḍāla*, however, smiled, and addressing Shankara, asked him how he could consistently teach Advaita if he practised such differentiating observances. The thin veil of Maya on the Guru's eyes

was removed; and the five beautiful, highly philosophical verses of the *Manīṣā Pañcaka*, expressive of noble Advaitic sentiments, and wherein Shankara acknowledges the *caṇḍāla* as his guru, were the outcome of this experience. We come across a similar incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda, the great modern Advaitin: the slight veil on the perfection of his Advaitic experience was removed by a dancing-girl at Khetri in Rajasthan.

There is another touching story as to how the popular and enchanting *Bhaja Govindam Stotra* came to be composed by Shankara. He saw a student who was deeply immersed in getting by heart the rules of Sanskrit grammar from the *Pāṇini Sūtra*s to the exclusion of devotion, meditation, and Self-enquiry. The utter futility of such a study for the realization of the Self and Spiritual Liberation came upon Shankara, who was then in a high mood of Self-absorption, and he spontaneously burst forth into that hymn.

From Varanasi, Shankara came to Prayāga (modern Allahabad) and met the great and learned Mīmāṁsā philosopher Śrī Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, who, nearing his life's end, directed Shankara to his famous disciple Maṇḍana Miśra, the well known Mīmāṁsaka of Māhiṣmatipura. Here a long debate was held between the two as to the relative merits of the Mīmāṁsā and the Advaita Vedanta systems to lead man to the Ultimate Truth and the highest goal of life and existence. Mandana's wife, Ubhaya-Bhāratī, herself a very learned lady well versed both in Mīmāṁsā and Vedanta, as her name seems to indicate, presided over the debate. The discussion went on for several days, and finally, overpowered by the profound and brilliant exposition of Shankara, Maṇḍana Miśra accepted the superiority of Shankara's views and became one of his chief sannyasin disciples under the name of Sureśvarācārya.

Even in those days, when travel was difficult, Shankara travelled widely all over India to propagate the all-uniting Advaita philosophy, for the resuscitation of society under its guidance. He covered practically all the important places in the country in all the four directions. He sent his chief disciples wherever he himself could

not go. He united the different prevalent religious sects under the auspices of Advaita without destroying their individuality. He also established ten orders of monks, known as the *Daśa-nāmīs*, for the propagation, in all parts of India, of Advaita, and the Vedic way of life, which advocates both *abhyudaya* and *niḥśreyasa*. He founded four important *maṭhas* (monasteries) at the four cardinal points of India to serve as headquarters for carrying on the work in the four zones—at Puri in the East in Orissa, at Dwaraka in the West in Gujarat, at Badrinath in the North in the Himalayas, and at Sringeri in the South in Karnataka on the bank of the Tungabhadra. He himself travelled up to Sringeri and stayed there for some time, and established a temple to Sāradā (Goddess Sarasvatī), who probably, in the guise of a poor old woman, had blessed the brahmacharin Shankara for the successful conclusion of his mission in life. Some attribute the *maṭha* at Kanchi in Tamil Nadu also to him. But it seems to have been established a few centuries later by another Abhinava Shankaracharya, who was a great devotee of the Devi and *Śrī Cakra Upāsanā*.

Shankara put the four important *maṭhas*, in east, west, north, and south, in charge of his four chief disciples—Hastāmalaka, Padmapāda, Toṭaka, and Sureśvara respectively. After making all the arrangements for carrying on his mission through these *maṭhas*, and firmly establishing them with proper rules for guidance, staff, etc. (cf. his *Maṭha Āmnāya*), Shankara finally visited Kashmir to ascend the famous 'Seat of Omniscience', known as the *Sarvajña Pīṭha*. Lastly, he came alone to Kedāreśvara in the snowy Himalayas at the age of thirty-two and entered into mahasamadhi. Kedāreśvara or Kedarnath is the place of Shiva; and it is no wonder that Sri Shankara, who is considered an incarnation of Shiva, returned to his original source at that holy place.

Chapter Two

Works Of Sri Shankara

1. Introduction

ACHARYA SHANKARA played a very prominent part in the cultural history of India as a mystic, philosopher, and teacher. Swami Vivekananda, who was the best exponent of Shankara's Advaita in modern times, has admired his keen intellect and philosophic genius and his work for the regeneration of the country. Some of the Western orientalists like Prof. Max Müller and Prof. Paul Deussen have paid glowing tributes to his works and have expounded his philosophy. Shankara lived for barely thirty-two years, but that short life was full of tremendous constructive activity and dynamic universal thought. The forces he released through his life and work brought about a new epoch and shaped the course of the cultural history of India. The momentum of those forces for the rejuvenation of religion and society on a philosophical and scientific basis continues unabated even to this day, and the work of regeneration of humanity initiated by him is still progressing, through the instrumentality of the great Swami Vivekananda, and is now reaching out to the whole world.

We shall deal here with the main literary works of Shankara, making brief reference to the important aspects of his life. The need for a very reliable and clear historical account of the life of Shankara, sifting out the mythological portions, is being felt increasingly, though recently some books have been published based on the *Śaṅkara Digvijaya* of Vidyāraṇya, as Shankara's thought is being studied widely in other parts of the world. This of course entails intense and wide research. His Advaita philosophy enjoys a growing popularity not only in India but also in Europe and America.

Scholars of the East as well as the West are making a critical study of his works and philosophy. This kind of intellectual study of Shankara's works has naturally aroused a great deal of interest in the details of his life. Yet, there is scarcely any reliable work written in the true historical spirit.

2. Works of Sri Shankara

There are a large number of works in prose and poetry attributed to Shankara, all of which may not have been composed by the original Acharya Shankara (*Ādi Śaṅkara*). He is reputed to have completed all his major writings before he was twenty-four. After that he might have composed some devotional and philosophical hymns (*stotras*) and didactic works. According to a list of works given in the *Śaṅkara Grantha Ratnāvalī* in Bengali script, there are 153 works attributed to Shankara (see Appendix B), as follows:

1. *Bhāṣya granthas*: 23
2. *Prakaraṇa* and *upadeśa granthas*: 54
3. *Stotra-stuti granthas*: 76

Of these three types of works, *bhāṣyas* on the *Brahma Sūtra*s, the ten Upanishads, and the *Gītā* (*Prasthānatraya*); *prakaraṇa granthas* such as *Upadeśa Sāhasrī*, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, *Aparokṣa-anubhūti*, *Ātmabodha*; and *stotra granthas*, such as *Ānandalaharī*, *Govindāṣṭaka*, *Dakṣiṇāmūrti*, *Daśaślokī*, *Dvādaśa Pañjarikā*, *Bhaja Govindam*, *Viṣṇu Ṣaṭpadi*, *Harimīḍe*, *Kaupīna Pañcaka*, *Manīṣā Pañ-caka*, and *Nirvāṇa Ṣaṭka* are the important ones, which have also been recognized generally as the authentic works of Shankara.

Doubts are cast as to the real authorship of Shankara in regard to some of the other works attributed to him. Some of the objections raised against the authorship of Shankara of such a large number of works are as follows:

1. Shankara could not have written so many works in the course of a short life of thirty-two years.
2. The ideas and conclusions in several of the works differ from those in his principal works.

3. The language and style of all the works are not the same; and in several of the works, the Puranas are largely quoted, which is contrary to the practice of Shankara.
4. All his works are not current in all parts of India; several of them are limited to certain areas and are not known in other parts.

Adducing reasons for the large number of works attributed to him, it is pointed out that—

1. Since the heads of all the important *maṭhas* of his school are also called Shankaracharya, some of their works have been very often attributed to Ādi Shankara.
2. Several authors, to propagate their own works, have passed them off in the name of Ādi Shankara, as has been the case, not infrequently, in the Indian literary world and elsewhere, where importance is given to the ideas of the author rather than the person.
3. Several people have composed works in the name of Shankara to gain authority for their own sectarian views.
4. Some of the opponents of Shankara have given currency to certain works as written by him to discredit Shankara and to misrepresent his views.

These arguments have been countered by others. They hold that—

1. For a genius like Shankara, it was not a difficult task to compose so many works.
2. Shankara composed many of his stotras and other *prakaraṇa granthas* for the benefit of people in different stages of development, and Shankara's philosophy being a synthetic and all-comprehensive approach, it was natural for him to take up different positions to suit the needs of the people. Such differences in language and presentation are seen in the authentic works of all great people who have a mission in life. (We find such differences in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* too.)
3. As to language, style, etc., there is always a difference in language and style, according to subject-matter and intended readership, even in the case of living writers, the authorship of whose works

is not in doubt. It is therefore natural there should be such differences in several of Shankara's works, and sometimes, even within the same work. Even with regard to those works which have been accepted definitely as of Shankara's authorship, this factor is present.

4. Since Shankara travelled so widely in the country and composed his works in different places, often to meet the local needs, all his works did not become current in all parts of India.

There may be truth in both views, and a much larger number of works might have been composed by Shankara than is readily acknowledged by many modern scholars. However, neither the greatness of Shankara nor the fulfillment of his mission depends upon the number of works he has written, but on their quality—the profound and eternal spirit they breathe, bringing life and hope to humankind. Hence, leaving aside controversies, let us now turn our attention to a consideration of Shankara's principal works, which are accepted as his by a majority of scholars.

3. Sri Shankara's Approach

Before we consider Sri Shankara's works, we may state in brief the position he takes in his works in dealing with the other systems of thought. Shankara's approach is always synthetic. He does not discard anything of value in either the *karma-kāṇḍa* of the Vedas or the systems opposed to his own. As far as possible, he tries to accommodate them in his all-comprehensive scheme, so far as they are not contradictory, finding for them an appropriate place therein. He counters only those aspects which are not conducive to the welfare of humanity and are based merely on speculation. Though he upholds the sole reality of Brahman, the One without a second—which is to be realized only through jnana, Brahman being our very Self—there is scope in his scheme for any amount of karma, bhakti, yoga, rituals and worship, tantra and mantra, mythology and legend, nay, even physical science and technology, on the phenomenal level, so long as man is identified with his psychophysi-

cal personality. He himself, as a person, was as much a bhakta as a jnani, as much a yogi (recently a commentary on the *Yoga Sūtras* attributed to him has been found), as a tremendous worker for the welfare of humanity. A study of his various works reveals this fact, and his own life is a blazing example of his all-comprehensive synthetic mind and dynamic activity.

Shankara gives a respected place for reason, but reason must subserve the *śrutis* (*śrutyanukūla tarka*) in the realm of transcendental supersensuous truths. This is not dogmatism; the view is based on the inherent limitations of reason itself, for reasoning cannot create facts. Facts exist in their own right, both on the physical and metaphysical levels, and we have to directly perceive or experience them with appropriate instruments of knowledge—like eyes in the realm of sight, ears in the realm of sound, mind in the realm of thoughts, and intuition in the realm of the spirit.[1] Reason can work only on the basis of data supplied by experience. It is only a 'street cleaner'; its function is negative. When a fact is given in experience, then reason can remove the logical obstructions to its intellectual apprehension, just as light removes darkness and enables us to see things, but does not create them. The transcendental Truth or the Ultimate Reality is given to us by direct intuitive experience (*aparokṣa anubūti*), the nature of which has been recorded in the *śrutis*. They are the realizations of trained seers in superconscious states of mind. Reason must help us to grasp it properly, warding off the doubts and problems that the intellect may pose initially. Only realization through practical spiritual efforts (sadhana) will prove the truth of the statements of the seers, and not any amount of armchair rational speculations.

So we find Shankara giving a secondary but important place to reason and primary importance to the *śrutis* in the realm of transcendental truths, since such truths are not amenable to sense-

---

1 Cf. *Br. Sū. Bhā.* 1.1.2: *"Bhūta vastu viṣayāṇām prāmāṇyam vastu tantram; tatra evam sati brahma-jñānam api vastu tantram eva, bhūta vastu viṣayatvāt."*

experience. It may also be noted that Shankara does not apply different criteria for reality on the material and spiritual planes, though the instrument of perception may be different in different spheres. Even as a scientist does, he applies the same criterion for reality in all fields, namely, *direct experience*; the means of experience may be intuition, mind, or senses—but the criterion of direct experience is the same and universal everywhere. Hence, the different *pramāṇas* (means of valid knowledge), sense-perception, inference, and scripture (*pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama*) have their own relative validity, and each is supreme in its own sphere. However, Shankara holds that Reality being one and integral, there cannot be any real contradiction between the different spheres of experience, just as ears which hear sound only do not contradict the eyes which see. The ultimate perceiver behind all perceptions of different kinds is one, the Atman or Self, and there all perceptions get harmonized, since all perceptions belong to It through different means.

Though there are a good number of original compilations of great merit, Shankara's best thought is to be found in his commentaries on the *Prasthānatraya*—the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sūtra*s, and the *Gītā*—the three basic texts of the Vedanta philosophy, dealing with revelation, reason, and realization (*śruti*, *yukti*, and *svānubhūti*). The Upanishads supply him with the fundamentals of his Advaitic philosophy that the Ultimate Truth or Reality is One and Indivisible in the midst of Its different phenomenal manifestations; the *Brahma Sūtra*s help him to systematize the teachings of the Upanishads and establish the oneness of Reality on a rational basis; and the *Gītā*, which provides the techniques for the practical realization of that Reality (*sādhana-śāstra*) and its union with the Inner-Self (*Pratyak-Ātman*) through different yogic methods in a harmonious manner, and is hence known as the *yoga-śāstra* and *samanvaya-śāstra*, gives him the scope for his synthetic approach and practical application of the Advaita philosophy to life and thought. Thus these three form the broad basis of his comprehensive philosophy in which revelation, logic, and life are harmoniously blended and balanced.

4. Sri Shankara's Methodology

Shankara's interpretation and exposition generally follow a certain method. He holds *śruti* as the highest authority in transcendental matters. Of course, there are criteria as to what is *śruti*. It must be universal, realizable, and beneficent to all.[2] He supports his statements and arguments first from the *śruti* with regard to supra-sensual realities, and then from the *smṛti* (works of great intellectual sages), and *nyāya* (reason)—*"śruti-smṛti-nyāyāt ca"* as he often puts it—and refers to universal experience as well (*sarva loka prasiddhaḥ*). Rarely does he quote the Puranas in his principal works. He emphasizes that the *śruti* is the highest *pramāṇa* for us with regard to things that are not within the range of the senses (*atīndriya vastu viṣaye śrutireva naḥ pramāṇam*). This point he often stresses in his commentaries on the Upanishads and the *Brahma Sūtras*: *"Śrutiśca naḥ atīndriya viṣaye vijñānotpattau nimittam"* (*Tai. Up. Bhā.* 2.6); *"Tasmāt śabdamūlā eva atīndriya artha yāthātmya-adhigamaḥ; śabda-mūlam brahma, śabda-pramāṇakam na indriya-pramāṇakam"* (*Br. Sū. Bhā.* 2.1.27).

However, Shankara is equally emphatic that with regard to facts of an empirical order we should resort to the empirical *pramāṇas* such as *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* (direct perception and inference) and not to the *śruti*. It has no jurisdiction over that field, just as the other *pramāṇas* are inoperative in the supersensory realm. Each instrument is valid in its own field, like the eyes in the realm of sight, and ears in the realm of sound. To know that fire is bright and hot, we do not need a *śruti* to tell it to us; it is a matter of ordinary sense experience; and it is valid on that plane of experience. In an investigation of truth, the laying down of such a principle is imperative, as otherwise, we go beyond our own means of knowledge and shall have no firm ground to stand upon. There will be confusion as to valid knowledge due to the encroachment of the different *pramāṇas*

---

2 *Śruti* and other *pramāṇas* are discussed in detail in Chapter 3, pp. 28–34

on each other's fields of operation. In modern times this is evidenced by empirical science encroaching upon the spiritual realm and causing confusion in the minds of people. Similarly, Christianity in Europe tried to encroach upon the empirical field of science with undesirable consequences. Hence, we have to refer back to experience (*anubhūti*) at every step. The world is pervaded by Truth, and it has Truth as its substratum; as such, every experience has an element of truth in it and is valid in its own sphere. We have the right to transcend particular experiences on a lower plane in the light of higher and more general experience, but not to reject a valid experience in its own sphere.

This fact leads Shankara to adopt the theory of the three degrees of Truth or Reality—the *pāramārthika-sattā* (the Highest Truth as it is in Itself, taught by the *śrutis*); *vyāvahārika-sattā* (Truth as it has manifested in the phenomenal universe, the basis of all our relations, thoughts, and activities); and *prātibhāsika-sattā* (illusory experiences, which have the *vyāvahārika* or empirical entities as their substratum). In each of these, the conceptual notion of the later one is sublated when the true knowledge of the earlier one arises. Because of this threefold scheme of the view of Reality, Shankara is able to harmonize all our experiences, sacred and secular (*vaidika* and *laukika*), which gives to his writings a modernness which is unique. Compare this with our empirical knowledge in modern science: Science holds that all entities are nothing but energy in the final analysis; that energy forms into atoms and chemical elements; and by a permutation and combination of the chemical elements, entities and beings evolve and life's activities take place. All these three steps are true at the same time. Similar is the case with the three grades of Reality, which are true at the same time in their own sphere without contradicting each other. *We only transcend in knowledge* and reach the Highest Reality, while the different manifestations remain as they are for the persons and entities on those planes, like the effect of the earth's gravitation here on earth, which is ineffective beyond its range.

Shankara's language is brief, precise, and lucid, and his prose has few rivals in its classical grandeur. His thought is deep and majestic, his vision comprehensive, and his attitude generous. He is never dogmatic. We find him very often giving alternate meanings to scriptural passages. As far as scientific knowledge is concerned, he accepts it on its own level, for it finds a proper place in his scheme of thought as *vyāvahārika-sattā* (empirical reality) and does not affect his philosophical position in the least.

The primary object of Shankara in writing the commentaries seems to be the establishment of the all-comprehensive *Vaidika dharma*, with the all-comprehensive Advaita as its philosophical background. The Vedic scheme of life visualizes the welfare of the individual both on the material and spiritual planes (*abhyudaya* and *niḥśreyasa*). It takes man from where he is and tries to give him a lift upwards. That is why it provides for the four values to be realized in life—*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*—according to the needs of different people. Further, through its graduated scheme of *varṇāśrama dharma*, it tries to find a place for every person in the socio-economic life of society on the basis of the *varṇa* scheme, and brings the blessings of *Mokṣa* or Spiritual Liberation to the door of each, in whatever position one be in the social scale, on the basis of the *āśrama* scheme. It regulates the life of the individual and conserves and canalizes his energies for the realization of the highest end in life (*param puruṣārtha*). It provides a ladder, as it were, to scale the highest state.[3]

To propound and establish such an integrated scheme of life—which elevates us gradually, without violently tearing us away from the context of our life and society, provides for the highest fulfilment of humanity, individual as well as social, and tries to bring the deliverances of the Supreme Reality to shape our daily lives and conduct—is the object of Shankara's efforts. In the introduction to his *Gītā Bhāṣya*, he clearly states that the dharma proclaimed in

3 *Mahābhārata* 12.234.15: *"Catuṣpadī hi niḥśreṇī brahmaṇi eṣā pratiṣṭhitā; etām āruhya niḥśreṇīm brahmaloke mahīyate."*

the Vedas has two aspects, *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* (going outward and turning inward)—the foundations for the proper maintenance of order in the universe—which help all beings to attain secular welfare and spiritual fulfilment (see note 5, p. 27).

Though Shankara upholds the primacy of jnana for the realization of the identity of the trans-personal ultimate Reality (Brahman) with our Inner Self (*Pratyak-Ātman*), he does acknowledge the necessity of bhakti to the personal aspect of Brahman (*Īśvara*) by whose grace one attains jnana (*Īśvara-prasāda-nimitta jñāna-prāptyā eva—Gītā Bhāṣya* 2.39). He recognizes that the same impersonal Brahman appears as the personal *Īśvara*, the Creator and Lord of the universe. Rather, the same Reality is manifesting as *Īśvara*, *jīva*, and *jagat*. As long as one of these lasts, the other two also exist as its correlates. So, *within the phenomenal realm*, there is ample scope for the grace of *Īśvara* (*Īśvara-anugraha*), and an honoured place for bhakti and karma, for various gods and goddesses, for different states of existence and *lokas* (world-planes), and for all achievements and their means, both worldly and heavenly.

In interpreting the texts, Shankara accepts the exegetical method of the *Mīmāṁsakas*, the logical method of the *Naiyāyikas*, and the evolutionary hypothesis (*satkārya-vāda*) and the theory of *guṇa*-transformation (*guṇa-pariṇāma* or *guṇa-utkarṣa*) of the *Sāṁkhyas*, with slight modifications. When he refutes the other systems, as he does in the *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, he does so not for the sake of refuting them, but only to establish his own position, and he refutes only as much as is unacceptable to him in those systems. Further, generally *he refutes every system on the basis of its own accepted premises*. Stating one's own position (*sva-pakṣa-maṇḍana*) and refuting other positions (*para-pakṣa-khaṇḍana*) has been a recognized method of establishing a system of thought in India. Moreover, the object in thus establishing a system by refuting other positions was meant not so much for public display as for closing all loopholes in arguments and strengthening the convictions of one's own followers (*niṣṭhā dārḍhyāya*).

Just as Shankara's introduction to the *Gītā* is famous from the socio-spiritual point of view, similarly from the philosophical point of view, the *Adhyāsa Bhāṣya* or the introduction to the *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya* is justly reputed. The quintessence of Shankara's philosophical thought is compressed therein. And his approach there is so rational, so clear, and so profound that it has become a classic by itself. Of the Upanishad *bhāṣya*s, the most perspicacious are those of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya*. Of the smaller Upanishads, the *Taittirīya*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, and *Muṇḍaka bhāṣya*s contain many grand thoughts. Among the *prakaraṇa granthas*, the *Upadeśa-sāhasrī* and the *Vivekacūḍamaṇi* (which is a poetic masterpiece) are commendable; and of many *stotras* the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti* is incomparable for its philosophic depth and beauty, his *Bhaja Govindam* for the depiction of the vanity of worldly life, his *Manīṣā Pañcaka* for broad views and Advaitic realization, and his other *stotras* for fervent devotion. Shankara has to his credit *stotras* on different deities of the principal Hindu sects, testifying to his liberal views.

Shankara's commentaries have been annotated by several scholarly monks and pundits. Of these, his disciple Sureśvarācārya's *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Taittirīya Vārtikas*, Ānandagiri's *Ṭīkā* on the *Prasthānatraya*, and Vācaspati Miśra's *Bhāmati Ṭīkā* on the *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya* (first four *sūtras* only) are famous.

Finally, it may again be emphasized that in evaluating Shankara's works what should guide us is not the view of Shankara as an eminent scholar, or even as a great philosopher, but as an illumined seer who had in his compassionate heart the sole purpose of the reconstruction of society and the bringing of the blessings of the highest Truth, of the Oneness of all Existence, to inform and elevate our lives so that every one of us may realize that Truth in our own heart, and peace and bliss may reign supreme in the world (*lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu*). Shankara is indeed *Loka-śaṁkara*.

Chapter Three

Mission of Sri Shankaracharya

1. The Socio-Spiritual Conditions at the Time of Sri Shankara

BUDDHISM WAS DECLINING in India after flourishing for nearly a thousand years. In the midst of the prevailing degenerate religious and social conditions, Shankara was fired with zeal to re-establish the supremacy of the Vedic religion and philosophy in all its pristine purity and grandeur and to cleanse society of all accretions and excesses by assimilating to it the good points in Buddhism that were in harmony with the Vedic teachings. Like Swami Vivekananda in recent times, he wanted to bring about an all-round regeneration and rejuvenation of the country.[1]

Shankara saw the glory of the Vedic *Sanātana Dharma* and the situation that was prevailing in the country. He saw that the religion of the Buddha had degenerated into various corrupt practices owing to the mass influx into the Buddhist fold of all sorts of unregenerate people. Buddha's teachings were misunderstood, and on the basis of nihilistic dialectics and destructive reasoning the life-giving principles taught by the Vedas and the Buddha were discarded by Buddhist philosophers. There was a lot of confusion in society.

Buddha in his own time had set aside vain philosophical speculations and heaven-seeking ritualism, which often involved sacrifices of animals (since the people in general were meat-eaters) and the neglect of man and his suffering here. He initiated a reformatory movement, with emphasis on a practical ethical life of building character and attaining true wisdom, and feeling sympathy and

---

1 There are several striking resemblances and parallelisms in the life and work of Acharya Shankara and Swami Vivekananda, which need a separate treatment to throw light on them in detail.

concern for the sufferings of others, to offset the situation that was then current.[2] He wanted people, instead of getting themselves enmeshed in wordy wranglings, to do something concretely good and to live a pure and moral life which would elevate them and enable them to see whatever truth there was, and thereby get rid of ignorance and suffering. In a sense, we may say that he taught the highest transcendental Advaita aspect of Vedanta, without generally using Vedantic terms, but taking its essence,[3] to the exclusion of the ritualistic and theistic aspects of Veda and Vedanta, with

---

2 It is the opinion of the present author that the Buddha himself did not intend to found any new religion, but only a monastic *saṅgha* (community) devoted to the practising and preaching of an ethical way of life (dharma) leading to the cessation of the cycle of birth and death and attainment of *nirvāṇa* by giving up clinging to the unreal personality and vain desires (*tṛṣṇā*)—which is the cause of all suffering. His approach was rational, and was based on empirical principles, not on theology. While monasteries proliferated and spread widely, and large numbers of people were devoted to the Buddha and the *saṅgha* and its teachings, probably the lay people in India mostly continued to follow the Vedic religious and social life as well. The conception of *dharma* in India was and is quite different from that of *religion* as understood by people to the west of India, and proselytization was unfamiliar to the followers of different dharmas. Whatever was appealing in any teaching was freely accepted and added on to one's life without eschewing what was worthwhile in what one already followed. Only in countries where there were no strong indigenous religious movements did the people turn completely Buddhist; but not so in China or Japan, where they continued with their old practices along with those of Buddhism, accepting Buddha as the highest ideal. In a way, this may be compared in this respect to the present Ramakrishna Movement, which people follow and patronize, accepting Sri Ramakrishna as the highest ideal, without giving up their traditional religio-social life. Then, as now, the the teachings were most fully followed by the monks in the monasteries.

3 Sometimes Buddha used words like *Brahma-bhūta, Brahma-vihāra,* etc. See Dr. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (Vol. 1, 2nd edition), *Appendix,* on the relation of Buddha's teaching to the Upanishads and his indebtedness to them. One may consult also Sir Charles Eliot's three volumes on *Hinduism and Buddhism* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1954) and J.G. Jennings, *Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha* (Oxford University Press, London, 1947). The *Amara-koṣa* refers to Buddha as *'advaya-vādi'.*

emphasis on Yoga, practical ethics, and removal of suffering. He advocated self-effort and exhorted people to work out their salvation with diligence.

Bhagavan Buddha's illustrious and noble personality and magnanimous heart lent force to his teachings, and they became very popular and widespread for some centuries. But that by itself is not sufficient. In the early stages, people need a Supreme Being from whom to seek divine help, and to satisfy the psychological urge to pay homage, to worship, and to love. They want to know about themselves, and seek permanence. Human beings are rational beings, and want to find out, want to satisfy themselves through reason, about the fundamental principles that govern this universe, before they can devote themselves to supersensuous religious life with conviction. Since that was not available, Buddha's followers, in course of time, took it upon themselves to build up philosophies on the basis of pure reason, presenting his teachings negatively, often interpreting his silence on certain metaphysical matters in their own way; and these were taught to one and all irrespective of their power of understanding or capactiy to practise. Further, the masses deified the Buddha into the highest God, since they needed one.

As we know, empirical reason by itself cannot give us supersensuous Truth. Therefore, naturally, reason led into various blind alleys. Hence, whereas the scholarly and intelligent sections dabbled in subtle reasonings and philosophies, the masses were confused; and, because of the negativistic teachings of impermanence (*kṣaṇika-vāda*), *no-self* doctrine (*anātma-vāda*), denial of God, and excessive emphasis on austere dry monasticism and its indiscriminate propagation, ordinary people were misled. Unable to follow these monastic ideals, the whole society degenerated. By the third century AD, many secret societies, conclaves, and degenerate sects arose among the Buddhists. *Vāmācāra* works like the *Guhya-Samāja-Tantra*, with bacchanalian and orgiastic doctrines based on the *Manjuśrī-mūlakalpa*, emerged to support and advocate such corrupt practices, and they exercised influence on certain sections of

non-Buddhist religious followers as well. In the prevailing climate of thought and life, the Vedic society also had degenerated to some extent for want of great teachers and lack of propagation of good ideas and true doctrines. As a result, immoral practices of all sorts set in and became rampant throughout the land.

There was no doubt substantial reaction in the country, and attempts were being made to bring the people back to the Vedic dharma, as we can see from the rise of the Gupta and other empires in the north, and the Pallava, Chola, Cera, and Pāṇḍya kingdoms in the south, who supported the *Vaidika dharma*. The bhakti movements of Ālwārs and Nāyanmārs also strove hard to bring back the Buddhists and other people to the Vedic path, and preached theistic devotional *Vaiṣṇavism* and *Śaivism*. The great Shankara arose at this juncture in Kerala.[4] He saw clearly that if the people were to be won back to the Vedic fold, then—

1. The extravagances of Vedic ritualism, involving sacrificing of animals, must be mitigated, and ritualism must be purified and spiritualized.
2. There must be place for a God of mercy who can be worshipped and loved.
3. The absolutistic and the personalistic *śruti* texts must be harmonized, and there must be place for jnana, bhakti, karma, and yoga in a harmonious manner.
4. A thousand year long Buddhistic heritage cannot be done away with. The good points in it, which are not contradictory to the Vedic doctrines, must be fused with the Vedic heritage, purifying and modifying both to suit the times.
5. Society must be oriented to the spiritual ideal; but the duties and modes of spiritual sadhana of people must be regulated and

---

4 There is still no definite consensus of opinion about the date of Shankara. Though the date AD 788–820 is generally ascribed to him, mostly by Western orientalists, some eminent Eastern and Western scholars would put it back at least by two centuries with cogent evidence, while others would put it several centuries BC on various grounds.

harmonized with their capacities, understanding, and stage of development; and the pitfall of monasticism advocated universally by Buddhism without any high criteria, which led to the degeneration of both Buddhism and the monastic ideal, must be avoided. Society must grow from within in an all-round harmonious way; not merely that certain titbits of reforms be superimposed on it, neglecting all other aspects.

6. The negativistic and apparently nihilistic philosophy of Buddhism must be replaced by the philosophy of the Upanishadic Absolute Brahman, presenting Itself in all as the Self (Atman) and leading to Peace and Bliss Eternal, and it must be co-ordinated with the other systems of philosophy based on the Vedas which are dualistic and theistic in nature, but more easy for the people in general to understand and follow.

2. His Triple Scientific Methodology

Shankara started on his mission of propounding the comprehensive Advaitic doctrines as the basic uniting philosophy, and under its aegis, rejuvenating society and resuscitating *Vaidika dharma*, with its twofold objectives of *abhyudaya* and *niḥśreyasa*, i.e. secular welfare and prosperity, and spiritual felicity and freedom.[5]

This wonderful prodigy was around twenty at this time. For the fulfilment of his mission, he travelled all over the country on foot, from north to south and east to west—from Kashmir to Kanyākumārī and Kāmrūp to Kutch—meeting opponents in debate, making disciples, and purifying social and religious customs and practices.

He wrote profound commentaries in beautiful, clear, simple Sanskrit on the *Prasthānatraya*, the three foundational texts of the Vedanta philosophy, namely, (1) the Upanishads, where the Vedic thought and quest for the Ultimate Reality finds its culmination

---

5 See Śri Shankara's introduction to his commentary on the *Gītā*: *"Dvividho hi vedokto dharmaḥ, pravṛtti lakṣaṇo nivṛtti lakṣaṇaśca; jagataḥ sthitikāraṇam, prāṇinām sākṣāt abhyudaya niḥśreyasa hetuḥ."*

and is known as the Vedanta; (2) the *Brahma Sūtras*, which systematizes on a rational basis the various spiritual revelations and realizations of the sages that are recorded in the Upanishads and strings them together into a coherent philosophy of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality; and (3) the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which gives practical expression to this philosophy by showing the paths to the realization of that Reality and the methods of bringing our everyday life into harmony with the philosophical truths. Thus Vedanta has all these three aspects in its methodology: it has revelational tradition (*śruti*) as its basis, where we have got the profound direct spiritual intuitions of the great seers; then these intuitions have been put on a rational basis (*yukti*); and they are verified and realized by oneself in life through sadhana or spiritual practice (*svānubhūti*).[6] This makes Vedanta a complete spiritual science of a universally realizable philosophical religion open to rational investigation. It goes to the credit of the brilliant insight of Shankara to have introduced this triple scientific methodology for the first time in the history of philosophy and religion in the world.

So Shankara, when propounding his philosophy, takes recourse to all these three. And yet, he declares that he considers the *śruti* as the primary authority or means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) with regard to transcendental Truth, since it alone can give us first-hand knowledge of supra-sensual and supra-mental spiritual verities to form the hypotheses which may be later reasoned out and verified. If there is no experiential hypothesis, neither reasoning nor verification can take place.

3. Reason Vis-à-Vis Revelation (Scripture)

Why was it that such a keen and brilliant thinker as Shankara, who could refute other rationalistic systems of philosophy, both Vedic and non-Vedic, on a purely rational basis without taking recourse to scripture, sought to establish his philosophy of Advaita primarily

---

6 See *Vivek*. 281, 474–77.

on the basis of scripture? It is because he clearly saw with his keen insight the limitations of empirical reason and its conflicting nature when it is not wedded to experienced facts. Though reason is a very good instrument, and we have perforce to take recourse to it in communicating with others, it is not capable of yielding truth or facts by itself. It can evaluate, analyze, co-ordinate, and infer; but it can act only on the basis of direct or previous perceptions. It cannot create facts or determine their nature, which depend on the things themselves and not on reason. It can be compared to light which can only reveal existing things, but does not create them. This is evident in the case of sensory knowledge or perception. The knowledge of things depends upon their perception through the senses, but the existence of the things themselves does not depend on their being perceived. Moreover, the senses may be defective. Then comes reason to correct our knowledge with reference to our own previous perceptions or perceptions of others. So reason is very helpful in rectifying our knowledge through analysis, co-ordination, etc., and to posit new facts on the basis of inference, which, however, need to be verified by direct perception.

Just as, in regard to external phenomena and the external world the senses are our instruments of knowledge, similarly, with regard to things that are transcendental and are not amenable to the senses or the ordinary mind it is intuition or suprasensual perception that is the criterion of knowledge. *We directly perceive the truth—we do not reason it out; for the truth of the reason itself is directly perceived.* No amount of reasoning in a vacuum can give us an inkling of truth, nor can we experience it by mere reasoning. It can only build on perceived facts, and its conclusions again need to be confirmed by perception or direct experience. Ultimately, the truth of reasoning is also intuited; it cannot depend on another reasoning to prove its truth, for it will lead to a *regressus ad infinitum.* Therefore, in the case of both external sensual phenomena and the suprasensual reality, direct perception or experience (*aparokṣa anubhūti*) is the primary criterion. And the scripture is the record of such

spiritual perceptions. They give us the hypotheses of these truths; and to ascertain their correctness and their probability we have to employ reason, and must realize them to verify their truth as facts and have conviction.

That is why Shankara, while giving primacy to the scriptures or revelation (*śruti*), stresses the inevitability of the other two *pramāṇa*s, reasoning (*yukti*) and realization (*svānubhūti*), and this last one he considers the final clinching *pramāṇa*. It is accepted that, though reason cannot give truth directly, truth cannot contradict or be disharmonious with reason. Otherwise any individual or group can claim its book as a scripture. Again, a scripture is not a *pramāṇa* in empirical matters, where other *pramāṇa*s are operative.

It is the beauty of the Upanishads that they themselves uphold this threefold criteria of truth. They declare: *"Ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo, mantavyo, nididhyāsitavyaḥ."*[7] The Self, my dear, is to be seen. How has it to be seen? It has to be heard about first (*śrotavyaḥ*); It should be first heard about from those who have seen It or from the scriptures. Then we have to cogitate about it (*mantavyaḥ*) and find out whether it stands to reason, whether the intuition is correct and whether there is possibility of its existence. After proper reflection on the matter, when working faith is generated in the mind, we have to strive to realize it ourselves through the prescribed sadhanas or spiritual practices (*nididhyāsa*). (Cf. *Vivek.* 70.) We may also compare our experience with other experimenters in the field. However, real Self-realization brings immediate and unshakable certitude and conviction, like seeing the sun. So, ultimately, realization is the final *pramāṇa*. It is only when we have experienced the Truth ourselves and find it to be in harmony with the other *pramāṇa*s that we get a firm conviction, and not before that—neither through the scripture nor through reasoning. All the three *pramāṇa*s have to be employed in a mutually co-ordinated manner, reinforcing each other, and not in isolation, to arrive at

---

7 *Bṛh. Up.* 2.4.5.

Truth—for though each *pramāṇa* is great in its own place, there will remain uncertainty and every chance of going wrong or awry if each is pursued exclusively. Therefore Shankara says: *"Śrutyā, yuktyā, svānubhūtyā jñātvā sārvātmyam ātmanaḥ*—having realized the oneness and infinity of the Self in all through scripture, reasoning, and one's own experience."[8]

The spiritual truths are given to us through the *śruti*; because these relate to *atīndriya vastu* (supra-sensual Reality), Shankara says: "In regard to supra-sensual verities *śruti* alone is our *pramāṇa* (*atīndriya vastu viṣaye śrutireva naḥ pramāṇam*)."[9] But anyone may produce a book and claim it is a scripture. So it must be in harmony with reason or logic (*yukti*, *nyāya* or *tarka*). But *tarka* by itself has no firm basis (*tarka apratiṣṭhānāt*). One person may put forward a conclusion very cogently and another may demolish it with equally powerful reasons, as we see in life. Still all the while, we may only be wrangling with words and not concerned with actual facts at all.[10] Hence the appeal to experience. All three together must affirm the Truth.

4. A Harmonizing Scientific Philosophy of the Secular and Spiritual, Physical and Metaphysical.

Shankara therefore builds up his comprehensive philosophy on the basis of *śruti*, supports it with reason, and appeals to experience. When he meets other philosophers, he meets them on their own ground. Shankara was not only scientific in his outlook, but also comprehensive and inclusive in his approach. He did not argue with others, or refute other systems of philosophy, merely for the sake of doing so. He refuted only those points which were contrary

---

8 *Vivek.* 281; cf. *Vivek.* 474–77; also see his commentary on the *Kena Up.* 2.1: *"Yathoktam ācāryeṇa āgamam arthato vicārya, tarkataḥ ca nirdhārya, svānubhavam kritvā."*

9 Cf. *Br. Sū. Bhā.* 2.3.1: *"Śrutiśca naḥ pramāṇam atīndriya artha vijñānotpattau."* See also commentary on *Tai. Up.* 2.6 for a similar statement.

10 See *Br. Sū. Bhā.* 2.1.11 and *Kaṭha Up. Bhā.* 2.1.9–10 regarding the inadequacy of *tarka.*

to any of the above three criteria. He accepted the other aspects in them to the extent they were in harmony with these. He knew that Truth can be expressed in different ways on the phenomenal plane, and as such he also accepted the relative validity of certain aspects of truth in their own fields, though not as Ultimate Truth. For instance, he was bold enough to state that each *pramāṇa* has its own sphere of operation where it is fully valid. *Śruti* has its own sphere, reasoning has its own sphere, and sense-perception has its own sphere. And in each sphere that particular type of *pramāṇa* is operative and dominant.[11] He declares that the scripture has no validity where it contradicts direct perception. Supposing the *śruti* comes to the level of the phenomenal world, where the sense-perception is the *pramāṇa*, and says something which is contrary to our sense-experience, that fire is dark and cold, then, even if there be hundreds of such texts, they have to be rejected as invalid, because they contradict the patent experience of everybody on the sense-perception plane that fire is brilliant and hot.[12] Similarly, sense-experience cannot be a valid authority on the transcendental plane. There is day and night from the standpoint of the earth, but there is no day or night from the standpoint of the sun.

The genius of Shankara was this, that he tried to co-ordinate all levels of human experience, transcendental and empirical, grade them properly, and give them the validity they deserved in their own realm. How did he do it? He did it on the basis of the criteria of Reality. There are three types of realities in experience: One is

---

11 Commentary on *Bṛh. Up.* 2.1.20: "*Sva-viṣaya-śūrāṇi hi pramāṇāni, śrotrādivat*—The valid means of knowledge are powerful in their own respective spheres, like ear, etc. (which are evidences in their particular fields only, such as sound etc.)"—that is, in the sphere of sound the ear is the authority, in the sphere of sight, the eyes, and so on. See *loc. cit.* for a lengthy illuminating discussion on the *pramāṇa*s and their jurisdiction.

12 See *Gītā Bhā.* 18.66.10: "*Pratyakṣādi-pramāṇānupalabdhe hi viṣaye . . . śruteḥ prāmāṇyam . . . na hi śruti śatam api śītaḥ agniḥ aprakāśaḥ vā iti bruvat prāmāṇyam upaiti*"; also commentary in *Bṛhad. Up.* 2.1.20: "*Na ca pramāṇam pramāṇāntareṇa virudhyate*—one valid means of knowledge cannot contradict another."

the absolute unchanging Reality, unaffected by the three divisions of time—past, present, and future (*trikāla-abādhita*)—and always the same. If an entity is ever subject to change and has only conditioned existence, it cannot be called absolutely real. *What is that entity which changes?* So, there is an unchanging Reality in the midst of all the changes which is Absolute Existence. This is termed *pāramārthika-sattā*. It has to be realized as It is. This pure Existence is designated in the Upanishads as *Sat* or *Brahman*, and It is realized as the pure Self within every being, the unchanging Witness (*sākṣī*) of all changes.

Then there is the ever-changing dynamic universe (*jagat*), which we experience as an object on the phenomenal plane, in which we as empirical persons live and act, philosophize, and realize values, as Shankara points out in the introduction to his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra*s. This has only conditioned phenomenal or empirical reality (*vyāvahārika-sattā*), like the reality of day and night on the earth. The souls (*jīva*s) are, like the reflections of the sun in water, reflections of the Absolute in psycho-physical organisms. They have bondage and liberation from the phenomenal point of view; but the real Inner Self in all beings, being Brahman Itself, which is the Ground of the universe, is ever pure, free, and perfect (*nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāva*), like the sun which is ever luminous and has no day or night, though it is their cause on the earth. Then there is *prātibhāsika-sattā*, which is apparent reality, like the mirage which is experienced and is mistaken for water, but is not amenable to activity as water. Such apparent objects have not even empirical reality, but can cause us fear and trouble due to delusion or mistaken notions.

The universe, on the other hand—though it is an ever-changing flow in the process of time, and things are not the same for two moments—cannot be dismissed as unreal like the mirage, because we live and move and have our being in it as empirical personalities, and we experience and conduct all our activities here. All entities in the universe are related to each other as conditioned realities and

have their mutual relative validity as long as they last. Change is the very essence of the universe—it is *jagat* (constant dynamic movement)—and it is change that makes activity possible. The changing universe of names and forms and concepts derives its reality from the unchanging Absolute or Brahman, which is its unchanging ground. It cannot exist by itself apart from Brahman, whereas Brahman, being Absolute Existence (*Sat*), can remain without the manifested universe. This is realized in transcendental experience, and the *śruti* declares it; but we have a somewhat cognate experience in the deep-sleep state, where we have something akin to non-dualistic Self-awareness, without the awareness of the universe or personality as an object, or even of the ego as 'I'.

Brahman transcends time, space, and causation, which are aspects of Maya; It is *Satyam-jñānam-anantam* (absolute Existence-consciousness-infinity). Brahman, being Infinite, is absolute Bliss (*ānandam*) as well; hence it is often referred to as *Sat-cit-ānanda.* The universe is subject to time-space-causation, and thus it is, as it were, Brahman's opposite. In this sense, the universe taken in itself is *mithyā* (relatively or phenomenally real); i.e. when compared to Brahman, it is *a-satyam* or *a-sat* (not-real), *a-jñānam* or *a-cit* (not-conscious), *an-anantam* or *sa-antam* (non-infinite or finite) and *nir-ānandam* (not-blissful). The universe expresses the characteristics of Brahman under conditions of time-space-causation in a dichotomistic manner (*dvandvātmaka*), that is, existence–non-existence, knowledge-ignorance, massive-minute, happiness-misery, etc.

So, there are these three types of realities. Shankara pointed out that the *śruti* states that the Ultimate Reality is non-dual indivisible Brahman (*akhaṇḍam advitīyam brahma*), and from that this whole universe has emerged through Its inscrutable Power called Maya, the principle of projection and relativity.[13] We can and do intuitively grasp Brahman, the Supreme Reality taught by the *śruti*, as

---

13 *Vivek.* 108: *"Avyakta-nāmnī parameśa śaktiḥ, anādi-avidyā triguṇātmikā parā; Kārya-anumeyā sudhiyā eva māyā, yayā jagat sarvam idam prasūyate."*

our Inner-Self (*Pratyak-Ātman*). When we come to the phenomenal world of mental-cum-sense-experience, within time-space-causation, reason becomes operative. Therefore, there must be a rational process by which we can understand and co-ordinate all phenomena. Shankara builds up with scriptural authority a consistent and coherent cosmology delineating the evolution of the universe from that Brahman through the power of Maya. Within this universe, man can validly conduct his various empirical activities, including those related to science and technology, as already pointed out. But if he confines himself only to that, he misses the Reality and becomes self-alienated by holding on to the unreal.

In relation to the universe and the living beings, Brahman associated with Its Maya-power is *Īśvara*, the Creator and Lord of the universe, who can be adored, worshipped, and loved. Thus Brahman is seen by us from the phenomenal point of view as the triad of *Īśvara-jīva-jagat* (God-soul-universe), and will ever appear to be so in time, and the game of the universe will go on. As such, Shankara asserts that we cannot do away with moral and ethical principles, devotion to and love of God, or even rituals, as also other aspirations and values which have a reference to the personality-based relative life, in this life or in after-life. And the scriptures too have their validity with reference to our social and spiritual well-being. They point out the way for us to transcend this relative existence and realize the Ultimate Truth, the incorporeal Infinite *Sat-cit-ānanda Ātman* as our real Self, and how to order our life here in society towards that end.

Shankara points out that the dharma taught by the Vedas is two-fold, leading to *abhyudaya* (secular welfare) and *niḥśreyasa* (spiritual *Summum Bonum*). Therefore, society must be based on dharma (individual and social conduct in harmony with Truth), oriented to Spiritual Liberation (*Mokṣa*). Shankara recognized dharma, karma, *samsāra*, etc. in relative existence, which he holds can be transcended by bhakti (devotion) and self-surrender to *Īsvara* (the personal aspect of Brahman), or by jnana of the trans-

personal Absolute Brahman as one's real Self or Atman, that is, by Self-knowledge. And karma is auxiliary to both.

Shankara, with the support of the *śruti*, propounds not only the identity of Atman and Brahman, but also of *Īśvara-jīva-jagat* with Brahman,[14] for they are the manifestations of Brahman through Maya—Its innate creative power, like the shining power of light. Though Maya is experienced phenomenally as a separate entity, we cannot determine its precise nature (*anirvacanīya*). Maya seems to hide Brahman-Atman like a cloud the sun, acts as the creative power of *Iśvara*, covers the knowledge of the *jīva*, and serves as the material cause (*Prakṛti*) of the universe. It is inseparable from Brahman, like the burning property of fire from fire. The burning property (*dāhikā śakti*) is the very nature (*svarūpa*) of fire. The fire itself is not affected by it; only others are affected. Similarly, Maya is not cognized in Brahman as a separate entity; it is felt and recognized by us only in the state of duality engendered by Maya itself, and not when identity with Brahman is realized. Thus Shankara establishes the absolute non-duality (Advaita) of Brahman in the transcendental state (*nirupādhika akhaṇḍa ekarasa advitīya Brahman*), which is taught by the *śruti* as the Ultimate Reality.

5. Universal Spiritual Religion

Can this Maya be transcended and the identity with Brahman be realized by the *jīva*? Yes, says Shankara, either—(1) By the grace of *Iśvara* (God), who is the Lord of Maya in the phenomenal state, through devotion and self-surrender unto Him, i.e. through the path of bhakti, which is an easy path;[15] or (2) By the direct but very difficult path of jnana (*kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā durgam pathaḥ*)[16] taught by the *śruti*, to be traversed with the help of a

---

14 *Vivek.* 478: "*Vedānta siddhānta niruktiḥ eṣā brahma eva jīvaḥ sakalam jagat ca; akhaṇḍa-rūpasthitiḥ eva mokṣaḥ brahmādvitīye śrutayaḥ pramāṇam.*"

15 See commentary on *Gītā* 7.14: "*Daivī hyeṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā, mām-eva ye prapadyante māyām etām taranti te.*"

16 See *Kaṭha Up.* 1.3.14 and Shankara's commentary on it. Cf. also *Vivek.* 476:

śrotriya brahma-niṣṭha guru through the renunciation of every type of worldly or other-worldly desires and meditation on the identity texts of the *śruti* (*mahāvākyas*).[17] The paths of Jnana-yoga, Bhakti-yoga, Karma-yoga, and several other yogas, leading ultimately to the supreme jnana and identity with Brahman, if desired, or conducive to merging in *Īśvara* and remaining with Him forever without seeking identity with Brahman, if preferred, are taught in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Shankara also admits the possibility of jnanis remaining on the level of bhakti and karma as *jīvanmuktas*. He also holds that the followers of other yogas too, if they so desire, can ultimately reach to a state of identity with Brahman, through jnana (acquired by God's grace, *niṣkāma* karma, or other means), *for this identity is a pre-existing natural non-dual state attainable by all*, since it is only to be recognized in knowledge, though initially the other yogas operate in the realm of duality. Here jnana or *jñānaniṣṭhā*, that is being established in jnana, may be distinguished from *jñāna-mārga* or the path of jnana.

The identity of Atman-Brahman or *jīvātman-paramātman* can be realized through the path of jnana only by those whose minds have been rendered one-pointed, subtle, and pure through spiritual

---

"The gurus as well as the *śrutis* instruct the disciple, standing aloof (*taṭasthitā*), while the man of realization crosses (*avidyā* or Maya), through illumination alone, backed by the grace of God (*Īśvara anugṛhītayā*)."

17 *Mun. Up.* 1.2.12–13 and Shankara's commentary. Cf. also commentary on *Ibid.*, 3.1.2: "*Kenacid parama-kāruṇikena darśita yoga-mārgaḥ, ahimsā satya brahmacarya sarva-tyāga śama-dama ādi sampannaḥ samāhitātmā san . . . paśyati*"; on 2.2.4: "*Apramattena—bāhyaviṣayopalabdhi tṛṣṇā-pramāda-varjitena, sarvato viraktena, jitendriyeṇa, ekāgra-cittena—veddhavyam brahma-lakṣyam*"; and on 2.2.8: "*Tat ātma-tattvam vijñānena-viśiṣṭena, śāstra-ācārya-upadeśa-janitena—jñānena, śama-dama-dhyāna-sarvatyāga vairāgya udbhūtena pari-paśyanti—sarvataḥ pūrṇam paśyanti, upalabhante, dhīrāḥ-vivekinaḥ.*"

See also commentary on *Gītā* 2.21.5: "*Śāstra ācārya upadeśa śamadamādi saṁskṛtaṁ manaḥ ātma-darśane kāraṇam. Tathā ca tadadhigamāya anumāne āgame ca sati jñānam na utpadyate iti sāhasa mātram*—The pure mind is the instrument of perceiving Atman. When both reasoning and scripture support Its realization, to say it is not possible is mere temerity."

and moral disciplines and trained in seeing subtle realities. As the *Kaṭha Upanishad* (1.3.12) says: "This Brahman is hidden deep in all beings as the Atman and is therefore not manifested; but It is verily perceived by aspirants well-versed in seeing subtle things by the one-pointed, sharp, subtle *buddhi*." Brahman as *Īśvara* is immanent in the universe and living beings. He is perceived in the hearts of all beings as the individualized soul (*jīvātman*) reflected in the *buddhi*. That very same Brahman, when we look through our personality, into our interior, into our hearts, we experience as the Atman. There is the infinite sky: if we look through the window of our room, we just glimpse a small patch of it; but we are seeing the very same vast sky. It is neither a patch of nor separate from the infinite sky. We realize it only when we come out of the room. Similarly, when we go beyond the five layers of our personality (*pañca-koṣa*) and the ego, which are like walls hiding our real nature, we realize that what we were taking as *jīvātman*, subject to all limitations, and were getting only a distorted glimpse of in our 'heart' or *buddhi*, is the very same Infinite Brahman, the substratum of the whole universe. So, Brahman is not only out there, is not only the substratum and source of the whole external universe, but is also 'in here'—is the substratum and source of our own personality (which is a part of the universe), and can be experienced and realized in the heart of our own being.

With that also dawns the knowledge that Brahman alone has become the triad *Īśvara-jīva-jagat*; Brahman is both the Absolute and the relative. And the Upanishad, describing the result of such a realization, declares: "When that one Brahman is realized in the Transcendent (*pare*) and the relative (*avare*), the knots (of ignorance) in the heart are cut asunder, all doubts are scattered (like mist before the sun), and all the effects of works (karma) done in a state of phenomenal existence wane away (like unto those done in dream which vanish on waking)." Such a person looking upon this universe as Brahman only (*Brahmaiva idam viśvam*), and seeing all beings in himself and himself in all beings, and the presence of

the Lord everywhere (*Īśāvāsyam idam sarvam*), moves about in the world bringing good to all like the spring spontaneously (*vasantavat lokahitam carantaḥ*) and opening the eyes of people to Truth.[18]

And Acharya Shankara was one such. Basing his teaching on the all-pervasive principle of Advaita, the one Reality pervading all aspects of life and existence, he gave impetus and support to all types of genuine spiritual striving. He said that the quarrel between various religious sects was futile, because all are attempting to reach the same Reality in different ways under different names and forms. It is the One Reality that is manifesting in different forms, and hence can be viewed and approached in different ways. Those who see duality as final, who see Reality as manifold, quarrel and come into conflict with each other, but those who see the One Reality pervading everywhere do not do so.[19] As Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā*, "Seeing with an equal eye the uniformly existing Lord everywhere, the man of wisdom does not injure the Self by the self, and thus reaches the highest Goal." (13.28) Also, "Verily, even here while living, they have conquered relative existence whose mind rests in evenness; they indeed rest in Brahman, since Brahman is without any imperfection and is equal in all."(5.19)

6. A Great Nation-Builder: Reconstruction of Religion and Society

Seeing the same Self working in, and manifesting through all religions, and going towards the same Goal, directly or indirectly, as the

18 *Mun.Up.* 2.2.8, 11; *Īśa Up.* 1, 6; Vivek. 37.

19 See *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* 3.17–18 and Shankara's commentary: "*Taiḥ anyonya virodhibhiḥ asmadīyo ayam vaidikaḥ sarva ananyatvāt ātmaikatva darśana pakṣo na virudhyate, yathā sva-hasta-pādādibhiḥ . . .* —As one is not in conflict with one's own hands and feet (though each is different), so also just because of non-difference from all, this Vedic view of ours, which sees the same Self (Atman) manifested in all, is not opposed to the different dualistic views, which are mutually in conflict with each other, each holding itself to be the one right view. Thus the idea sought to be conveyed is that the perfect view consists in realizing the Self of all as One, for this is not subject to the drawbacks of attachments and aversions."

Śiva-Mahimna stotra says, Shankara gave support to the differing religious sects, whether they worshipped Vishnu, Shiva, *Śakti*, Ganapati, Surya, *Kumāra*, or any other deity. That is why he is fittingly called the *Ṣaṇmata-sthāpanācārya* (Acharya who established six religious sects). It is the same ancient spirit which was declared in the *Ṛg-Veda*: *"Ekam sat; viprā bahudhā vadanti."* The same thought, the same river of this universal thought, is flowing through all Indian culture. That is why there had been very few religious conflicts in India, especially using violence, before the advent of fanatical Muslims. It is Shankara's genius that he gave philosophical basis and support to this idea of Oneness, or Unity in diversity, which is inherent in the very structure of Indian thought.

Thus Shankara, through his universal philosophy, gave a broad basis to all our thinking, both secular and spiritual. Then to perpetuate this philosophy, and for the establishment of dharma, of moral purity, which is a means to the realization of the goal of life, he founded, just as Swami Vivekananda has done in modern times, great spiritual centres called *maṭhas*, at the four quarters of India, for the propagation of noble universal ideas and ideals: one at Puri in the East, another at Dwaraka in the West, a third at Badarīnātha (Badrinath) in the North, and the fourth at Śṛṅgagiri (Sringeri) in the South. Under their jurisdiction he covered the whole country. The *pīṭha* at Kanchi seems to have been established later by Abhinava Shankaracharya, who was devoted to *Śrī Vidyā*. Shankara charged his chief disciples who were installed as the heads of these *maṭhas* with the task of disseminating dharma based on the twofold ideal of the Vedas—*abhyudaya* and *niḥśreyasa*.

There were numerous wandering monks all over the country. He organized them into ten monastic orders, called the *daśa-nāmī-sampradāya*, under the designations *Puri*, *Giri*, *Bhārati*, *Sarasvati*, *Tīrtha*, *Vana*, *Parvata*, *Sāgara*, *Araṇya*, and *Āśrama*, and inspired them with the mission of uplifting the country out of the morass of moral corruption and degeneration. They were enjoined to work in the cities and towns, hills and forests, and in places of pilgrim-

age and sea-coasts, as well as to cultivate philosophical knowledge; they were at the same time to be devoted to spiritual life and higher learning and the propagation of these from the established ashramas, as the names of the orders indicate. Thus the whole country was soon won over to and rejuvenated by the *Vaidika dharma*, which conduces to welfare in this world, as well as to spiritual fulfilment, whereby we realize the highest goal, the *Summum Bonum* of life.

When his earthly mission was accomplished, Shankara went to the holy Kedarnath, the place of Shiva in the northern heights of the snowy Himalayas, and entered into mahasamadhi, becoming one with *Śiva-Śaṅkara*, the Auspicious One, whose incarnation (*avatāra*) he is considered to be.

Shankara was thus a great towering personality who, within the course of a short life of thirty-two years, brought about a thorough revolution in the social, religious, spiritual, and philosophical life and thought of the country. He laid the foundations of modern Hinduism on a composite, comprehensive, and all-inclusive universal basis. He had such a brilliant mind, scientific viewpoint, and rational approach that he appeals to the people of today. He appears just as modern, in many respects, as if he were living today, for he was concerned with eternal universal thoughts. Some of the special problems that he dealt with in those days are here even today, and the solutions that he suggested are applicable even now. That is why he appeals to all modern people as well.

Apart from all these aspects, Shankara was a brilliant writer also. His Sanskrit is mellifluous, and at the same time very forceful, impressive, and direct. He has not only written commentaries on the ten major Upanishads, the *Brahma Sūtras*, and the *Gītā*, but also produced a large number of other important secondary auxiliary works (*prakaraṇa granthas*), like the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, *Upadeśa-sāhasrī*, etc. They elucidate the different aspects and tenets of the Advaita philosophy and its practical implications, in simple non-technical charming language, both in prose and verse, and show ways and means to the realization of the highest Truth. He has also

composed numerous beautiful and profound *stotras* (hymns) of a philosophical and realizational nature as well as those in praise and glorification of the different forms of the Lord (deities), and even of holy rivers and cities like Ganga and Kashi. They exhort men and women to devote themselves to the Lord and to strive for fulfilment in life by realizing the highest Truth, and not to waste this precious human life. This was one of the ways in which he gave support and fillip to all genuine religious efforts of mankind.

Shankara was thus a great illumined sage, philosopher, scholar, and poet; he was also a man of action, a great reformer and organizer, and a stabilizer of society by the resuscitation of ethical and spiritual values. Let us pay our humble homage to this luminous personality of vast universal dimensions that India produced, and who even now serves as a beacon light of great brilliance to both India and the world.

Part Two

The Philosophy of Sri Shankaracharya

The Philosophy of Sri Shankaracharya: An Elucidative and Reconciliatory Interpretation

Śruti-smṛtî-purāṇānām ālayam karuṇālayam;
Namāmi bhagavatpādam Saṅkaram loka-śaṁkaram.

I salute the divine feet of the great Shankara, the repository of *Śruti*, *Smṛti*, and *Purāṇas* and an abode of immense compassion, who ever accomplishes the good of the world.

THOUGH ACHARYA SHANKARA was a very practical, comprehensive philosopher-saint, who successfully worked for the regeneration of society as a whole and for the reinstatement of moral, religious, and spiritual values on a universal basis, there have been misunderstandings and misrepresentations of his fundamental concepts—concepts by virtue of which he had achieved the supreme task of harmoniously reconciling the empirical and supra-sensual verities—and often unjustified charges are levelled against 'his philosophy'. This is due to lack of vision and a sectarian incapacity to grasp the unique point of view of Shankara and the great effort he was making to synthesize and bring under a comprehensive system the whole gamut of Vedic religio-philosophic thought current up to his time, and to assimilate to it the worthwhile aspects of the other orthodox systems of thought and the contributions of Buddhism, which was an offshoot of Upanishadic thought.

1. The Task Before Sri Shankara

Shankara was no narrow dogmatic philosopher, nor a sectarian theologian. The task he was facing was an extremely difficult one.[1]

---

1 Similar difficulties were faced by Swami Vivekananda (though not on the philosophical plane), who tried to synthesize all the past heritage of India in the context of modern thought. Says he: "To put the Hindu ideas into Eng-

1. He had to integrate into a coherent system of thought, on the empirical rational plane, the highest realizations of the transcendental spiritual plane recorded in the Upanishads.
2. He had to co-ordinate the numerous statements in the scriptures affirming the non-dual, non-personal or trans-personal, and homogeneous nature of the Absolute Reality (*ekameva-advitīyam brahma*), denying all dualistic attributes to it (*neti, neti*), with the large number of other statements of a personal and positivistic description about the same Reality as the Supreme Being (*Īśvara*), the Manifester and Lord and Ruler of the universe, on the relative plane.
3. He had to take into consideration both the transcendence and immanence of that Reality. He had to remember the statements that the whole variegated universe and everything in it has originated from that Reality and everything merges back into It, losing all name and form, without affecting It, as also the declaration that the whole universe is nothing but Brahman (*Brahma eva idam viśvam*).[2]
4. He had to reconcile the statement about the emergence of the innumerable *jīva*s from Brahman (*akṣara*) of the same nature (*sarūpāḥ*), like sparks from fire, and their merging back again into the Source (*tathā akṣarāt vividhāḥ saumya bhavāḥ prajāyante tatra ca iva apiyanti*),[3] and the realizational statements of the

---

lish and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The dry, abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life: out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology, and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work."—*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1992–1997) Vol. 5 pp. 104–5

2 *Tai. Up.* 3.1; *Muṇ. Up.* 2.2.11, 3.2.8; cf. *Chā. Up.* 3.14.1: "*Sarvam khalu idaṁ Brahma tajjalān iti śānta upāsīta*"; *Māṇ. Up.* 7: "*Prapañcopaśamam śāntam śivam advaitam.*"

3 *Muṇ. Up.* 2.1.1

identity of Brahman, the Absolute Reality, and the Atman (the Self within), as stated by the *māhāvākyas "Ayam-ātmā-brahma"* and *"Tat-tvam-asi"*,[4] and that the one Atman is in all beings (*Ekaḥ tathā sarva-bhūtāntarātmā*).[5]

In the Upanishads we find the words Brahman and Atman used interchangeably, and all that is said of Brahman is also said of the Atman—intuitively cognized by all within the psychic heart—including depicting the Atman as the Source of the Universe.[6] The Upanishads sing the great glory of the Self frequently, and repeatedly exhort man to give up vain talk and realize the Self, for it is the 'Bridge of Immortality' (*amṛtasya eṣa setuḥ*).[7] By realizing it one goes beyond all sorrow (*tarati śokam ātmavit*) and attains infinite bliss.[8] They also declare that the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman Itself (*Brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati*)[9] and that everywhere and everything is Brahman.[10] Shankara thus saw that the central theme of the Upanishads is *ātmavidyā*—the realization of the Atman as Brahman, their identity—and all the rest move around that theme.

2. The Questions He Faced

Since Brahman is the non-dual transcendent Absolute, in systematizing the Upanishadic thought, Shankara had to face the relevant questions and explain logically how this experiential world of duality in which we find ourselves arose from a homogeneous non-

---

4 *Māṇ. Up.* 2; *Bṛh.Up.* 4.4.5; *Chā.Up.* 6.8.7

5 *Kaṭha Up.* 2.5.10, 11; cf. *Īśa Up.* 6, 7

6 *Tai. Up.* 2.1: *"Brahmavit-āpnoti param; tadeṣābhyuktā; satyam-jñānamanantam brahma: yo veda nihitam guhāyāṁ parame vyoman. . .Tasmādvā etasmād-ātmana ākāśaḥ saṁbhūtaḥ . . ."* Cf. *Muṇ. Up.* 2.2.1–5

7 *Muṇ.Up.* 2.2.5: *"Tameva ekam jānatha ātmānam anyā vāco vimuñcatha, amṛtasya eṣa setuḥ"*; *Bṛh. Up.* 2.4.5: *"Ātmā vā are dṛaṣṭavyaḥ . . .vijñānena idam sarvam viditam."*

8 *Chā. Up.* 7.1.3; cf. *Tai. Up. Brahmānandavallī*

9 *Muṇ. Up.* 3.2.9

10 *Ibid.* 2.2.11: *"Brahmaivedam amṛtam, purastād brahma, paścād brahma, dakṣiṇataśca uttareṇa; adhaśca-ūrdhvam ca prasṛtam; brahmaivedam viśvamidam variṣṭham."*

personal Reality, how Brahman became *Īśvara* and the *jīvas*, and how life in society, ethics and morality (dharma), and spiritual sadhana for liberation become meaningful. How can there be a place for a merciful, loving, and lovable God in this scheme, as also for karma and *upāsanā* or bhakti, which are based on the dualistic conception of the nature of Reality? Are the Vedic teachings of rituals, merit and demerit, and after-life and rebirth valid? And finally, what is bondage (*bandha*) and what is freedom (*Mukti*) in this scheme? In one word, Shankara was faced with the extremely intricate and difficult task of rendering the supreme transcendent Advaitic realisation into a comprehensive rational philosophy on the empirical plane.

3. The Guiding Principles of His Approach

How did Shankara successfully accomplish this task?

It must be remembered at the very outset that all philosophizing is done by us in this experiential phenomenal universe in which we already find ourselves with our empirical personality. It is also to be noted that at some point all philosophies and systems of thought, *including science*, have to encounter an unbridgeable logical gap when dealing with the ultimate reality of things. This natural limitation is common to all. But on account of that, we cannot, and should not, take recourse to unbridled imagination on the plea of the inexplicability of the Absolute or the Infinitude of God. Then it is no philosophy. We must narrow the gap to the irreducible minimum, and the scheme must be able to accommodate and explain the largest number of authoritative scriptural statements as well as empirical facts in harmony with reason and experience (*śruti*, *yukti*, and *svānubhūti*).

Secondly, we must note that Shankara was not inventing any philosophy of his own. He was only co-ordinating the Upanishadic statements in a systematic manner in light of the above principles. He did not reject what was rational and in accordance with experience in other systems also, Vedic or non-Vedic, on the empirical

plane. He was interested in formulating a total integrated philosophy of Truth, both in Its transcendent and relative aspects, on the basis of the above mentioned threefold evidence,[11] and not with any sectarian preference to serve preconceived purposes or notions, theological or otherwise.

4. Two Standpoints on Reality

Shankara saw clearly that the two orders of Reality, the transcendental and the empirical, being on different planes and of different orders of experience, the one Absolute and the other relative, the one Super-sensory and the other sensory, cannot be integrated completely from any one of the planes, especially through empirical reasoning, because all empirical reasoning is based on the experience of duality. The knowledge about them has to be viewed distinctly from two standpoints: (1) from the *noumenal* or thing-in-itself (*vastu-tantra*), and (2) from the *human* view (*puruṣa-tantra*)—that is, (1) the Reality (*vastu*) as it is in Itself, recorded in the *śruti* and realized only in the transcendental state, in identity, as Pure Non-dual Consciousness or Awareness (*Prajñānam Brahma*), and grasped here by us intuitively as the Pure-Witness-Self (*sākṣī*);[12] and (2) as It appears empirically to us as persons (*puruṣa*) endowed with body, senses, mind, intellect, etc., living in a given experiential

---

11 Discussed in detail in *Mission of Sri Shankara* (Part One, Chapter Three).

12 Existence (*Sat*) being One and Infinite and of the nature of Pure Consciousness or Awareness (*Cit*), and we being expressions of that Existence, Shankara holds, on the basis of the Upanishads, that the Ultimate Reality, even from the empirical point of view, is not totally unknown. (See *Kena Up.* 1.3: *"Atho avidităt adhi"*; also 2.11, 12: *"Vijñātam avijānatam; pratibodha viditam matam"*.) If It were entirely unknown, no philosophy of Reality would have been possible. It is well known, being intuitively cognized directly as the Pure Inner Self (*Pratyak-Ātman*), the source, or the indicated content, of the notion of 'I'. (See *Br. Sū. Bhā.* introduction: *Na tāvat ayam ekāntena aviṣayaḥ; asmat-pratyayaviṣayatvāt; aparokṣatvāt ca pratyagātma prasiddheḥ.*) We may, of course, have different views about It before proper inquiry.

universe.[13] Within this natural limitation Shankara builds up a wonderful system with the utmost harmony, without compromising the Supreme Truth or Ultimate Reality declared by the Upanishads.

5. The Absolute or Noumenal Reality

Now, the Upanishads declare that the Absolute Reality (Brahman), being non-dual and the origin of everything, is the *pure Subject*, and therefore, is beyond the reach of words and thought,[14] which can relate only to objects; and no phenomenal characterizations or predications can be made of It (*neti, neti*). In that sense It is attributeless (*nirguṇa*).[15] But, being the Reality and the Source of all phenomena, it is not an entity beyond experience (see note 12, p. 48). It is the Inner-Self (*Pratyak-Ātman*) of all, the eternal Subject. It is self-cognized within phenomena; that is, It is intuitively cognized, directly and intimately, as the Pure Witness-Self (*sākṣī*) within by all beings. It is the Ground and Source of all objective experience, internal or external, on the phenomenal plane, just as one is aware of one's eyes without seeing them, for they enable one to see all things.[16] This is the noumenal point of view. All phenomena are

---

13 Though generally *vastu-tantra* and *puruṣa-tantra* are applied to empirical knowledge—which is dependent on the *vastu* (nature of the entity), and karma or action—which is dependent on the Agent (*puruṣa*), the same criterion can be extended to our knowledges of the metaphysical reality—to the immediate knowledge (*aparokṣa-jñāna*), gained in supramental realization, and the mediate knowledge (*parokṣa-jñāna*), gained through the medium of our intelligence. Hence Shankara affirms: *"Evam bhūtavastu viṣayāṇām prāmāṇyam vastutantram. Tatra evam sati, brahma-jñānam api vastu-tantrameva, bhūtavastu viṣayatvāt"* (*Br. Su. Bha.* 1.1.2); and *"Ato na puruṣa-vyāpāra-tantrā brahma-vidyā. Kim tarhi? Pratyakṣādi—pramāṇa viṣaya-vastu jñānavat vastu-tantrā"* (*Br. Sū. Bhā.* 1.1.4).

14 *"Yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha."*(*Tai. Up.* 11.9)

15 All phenomenal attributes are the products of *Prakṛti* or Maya, which consists of the three *guṇas* (*triguṇātmikā—sattva, rajas, tamas*). Since Brahman is untouched by the *guṇas* of Maya and their products, in this sense also It is *nirguṇa.*

16 *"Eko devaḥ sarva bhūteṣu gūḍhaḥ, sarva-vyāpī sarva-bhūta-antarātmā;*

revealed by, and get their validity from, the Self, which is the Pure-Witness-Subject in all.[17]

The closest statement that can be made of Brahman or Atman from the empirical point of view is that It is *Absolute* Existence-Knowledge-Infinity (*Satyam-jñānam-anantam-brahma*),[18] and being Infinite, It is of the nature of Absolute Bliss (*ānandam*) as well,[19]

---

karmādhyakṣaḥ sarva-bhūtādhivāsaḥ, sākṣī cetā kevalo nirguṇaḥ ca." (*Śve. Up.* 6.11.) It is comparable to our image in the mirror which appears as it were seeing our face and giving us a knowledge of it, though in fact it is we who cast the image and see it, and also see that it is seeing us.

17 Since Brahman reveals Itself to all intuitively, directly, and immediately as the innermost Pure-Witness-Self (*Yat sākṣāt aparokṣāt brahma ya ātmā sarvāntaraḥ—Bṛh. Up.* 3.4.1), philosophizing about Truth and Ultimate Reality is possible, which would not have been the case if It was purely transcendental. It serves as the innate prototype of Truth and Perfection. Without the Self, no experience is possible. *Hence in the Upanishadic thought and Sri Shankara's philosophy, Brahman as the ever intuitively cognized Self within all (Atman) is the central concept—and not the purely transcendent Brahman, which is generally inferential and is realized by a few in the non-dual state of nirvikalpa samadhi only.* Though Brahman and Atman are identical in realization, it is on Brahman as experiential Atman that greater emphasis is laid in philosophy to indicate Its existential nature.

18 Since Existence-Knowledge/Consciousness-Infinity also are phenomenal conceptions, to obviate or offset their phenomenality or relative nature, the prefix *Absolute* is added. As such, taken along with '*neti, neti*', the characteristic of 'Existence' is used to deny non-existence in regard to Brahman; 'Knowledge' or 'Consciousness', to deny that It is insentient; and 'Infinity', to deny all limitations and duality in It. These are not Its attributes, but the very nature and substance of Ultimate Reality. When viewed phenomenally these are the nearest positive characterizations that we can make in trying to indicate Brahman. (See *Tai. Up.* 2.1 and note 6, p. 46.) To put it in other words, Brahman does not exist and cease to exist like phenomenal entities, *but It is Existence itself*, the source of all existing entities. Similarly, It does not possess consciousness, *but It is Consciousness itself*, the source of consciousness in all entities. It is not infinite in space or time, *but It is their source itself.* It is not endowed with bliss, *but It is Bliss itself*, the source of all joy in the universe. (Cf. *Bṛh. Up.* 4.3.32: *Eṣo'asya paramānandaḥ; etasya eva ānandasya anyāni bhūtāni mātrām upajīvanti*).

19 See *Muṇ. Up.* 2.2.7; *Tai. Up.* chapters 2 and 3; *Bṛh. Up.* 3.9.28, 4.9.28, 4.3.32; *Chā. Up.* 7.23.1

since It is the Plenum (*Pūrṇa, bhūmā*), and is beyond all dualities (*dvandvas*) and wants. Often *Cit* (Consciousness) is used in the place of *jñānam* (Knowledge). Thus Brahman is generally referred to as *Sat-cit-ānanda*.

6. The Relative or Phenomenal (Empirical) Reality

From the Absolute Infinite Existence-consciousness-bliss, beyond time-space-causation (which are phenomenal), arises this mysterious and variegated universe of our life and experience. None can know or say when or why or how.[20] However, we as empirical personalities within this given universe of time, space, and causation, functioning in and bound by it, cannot but relate it to Brahman in a causal relation and attribute the spontaneous emergence or projection (*sṛṣṭi*) of the universe to Brahman, by postulating an inscrutable (to us), veiling-projecting Maya-power of Brahman which presents to us, by veiling the nature of Reality from us, the finite changeful universe (*Māyā kalpita deśa-kāla-kalanā vaicitrya citrīkṛtam*)[21]

---

20 Cf. *Nāsadīya Sūkta* (*Ṛg-Veda* 10.129): "Who knew the way? Who there declared whence this arose? Projection whence? For after this projection came the gods. Who therefore knew indeed, came out this whence? This projection whence arose, whether held or whether not, He the ruler in the supreme sky, of this—He, O Sharman! knows, or knows not He perchance!" (Swami Vivekananda's translation.)

21 *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotra* 2: "The variegated universe is diversified by time, space, and causation, projected by Maya." Maya is conceived as having two aspects: *āvaraṇa-śakti* (veiling power) and *vikṣepa-śakti* (projecting or manifolding power). The concept of Maya was there from the Vedic times. Shankara did not invent it. He only made it precise and philosophical.

Cf. *Bṛh. Up.* 2.5.19: "*Rūpam rūpam pratirūpo babhūva . . . Indro māyābhiḥ pururūpa īyate . . . bahūni ca anantāni ca tad-etad brahma apūrvam anaparam anantaram abāhyam, ayam ātmā brahma sarvānubhūḥ.*" Also see *Śve. Up.* 1.10, 4. 9–10. The words "*Indro māyābhiḥ pururūpa īyate*" occur in the *Ṛg-Veda* also.

Maya is the innate or natural, eternal, and inseparable power of Brahman. Brahman is not affected by its own power of Maya and its product, the universe, just as fire is not affected by its own innate burning power and its radiation. The universe was not created at any particular time. It is beginningless and is eternally manifesting itself to external observers, who

without infringing the Absolute nature of Brahman.[22]

The Absolute Brahman, thus causally associated with the totality of the relative universe, is known as *Īśvara*, the Lord and Ruler of the universe and its beings. Since the universe and its entities and beings (psycho-physical organisms) are within the framework of time, space, and causation, they are finite, and hence they have only relative and finite existence-knowledge-bliss as their characteristic, *which they derive from Brahman*, their Ground and Source; they do not possess them as their nature. If the universe had them as its nature, it could exist by itself, know itself, or reveal itself. But it does not, or cannot, for it can reveal itself only in relation to a knowing subject or *jīva*, which is the reflection of the by-nature sentient Atman in a being. Dissociated from the Self, an object becomes a non-entity, for it derives its existence from the Self (*tadātmanā vinirmuktam asat saṁpadyate*).[23] The world does not make any statements by itself. It is the Self-based personality that experiences the world and studies it. But the Self can exist by itself without the experience of the personality and the world, as in deep sleep. No one is, or can ever be, aware of the destruction or absence of one's Self, but all are aware of the absence of universe-experience in deep sleep. The universe, being within time-space-causation, is witnessed by the unchanging Self as continuously changing, as a flow or process in time, and as subject to modifi-

---

are themselves part of the universe, even as there is no beginning for the burning power of fire or the shining of light, both of which are cognized only by experiencers external to them. The burning power of fire, the shining of light, and the projection of the universe by Maya are not willed acts, but spontaneous, innate, and natural.

22 Cf. *Chā.Up.* 6.1.4, 5, 6: "*Vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam mṛttikā iti eva satyam*", thrice repeated, asserting that all modifications are mere different names and forms, but the Substance which gives them reality, alone is the Truth.

23 Shankara's commentary on *Kaṭha Up.* 2.20. Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "Objects out of relation to a self are non-existent", since their existence cannot be vouched for. (S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1958) Vol. 1, p. 154)

cation, permutation and combination, and activity. And on the empirical plane, the derived existence-consciousness/knowledge-bliss appears dichotomized into the relativistic correlates (*dvandvas*) of existence/non-existence, consciousness/non-consciousness, knowledge/ignorance, joy/sorrow, etc., and other permutations and combinations of these in different degrees and varieties.

7. The Empirical Personality— Its Bondage and Liberation

The phenomenal universe consists of the permutations and combinations of the five (in modern scientific terms one hundred ten or more) basic elements, organic structures or bodies, life, senses, mind etc., and beings possessing these—all evolutionary products of Maya-power. They derive their consciousness and revealing power from the Self (Atman), which appears as the empirical soul (*jīva*) in association with or reflected in the subtlest part of the psycho-physical personality called *buddhi* (intelligence). This complex of the empirical soul with body, senses, mind, etc. is the empirical person—the experiencer, thinker, and doer in the universe.[24] This empirical person, being affected by the dichotomized (*dvandvātmaka*) nature of the universe owing to his limitations, passes through different types of experiences. He undertakes varied activities to satisfy his desires on account of his sense of limitedness, and goes through joys and sorrows, knowledge and ignorance, birth and death etc. according to his karma. This is his bondage

---

24 *"Ātmā-indriya-mano-yuktam bhoktā-ityāhuḥ manīṣiṇaḥ"* (*Kaṭha Up.* 1.3.4).

As has already been pointed out, the origin of the universe and its beings, the association of the Self with the body as the *jīva*, and the non-personal Brahman appearing as the personal *Īśvara* in association with the universe, are inexplicable through empirical logical reasoning, *for they do not occur within time and space which are themselves part of the universe.* They are empirical facts of experience and are attributed to the operation of the natural and eternal Maya-power of Brahman, which projects them spontaneously, just as the mind projects the dream-universe spontaneously. They are therefore beginningless in time.

(*bandha* or *saṁsāra*). In due course, he, the empirical person, becomes aware through the teachings of the *śāstra*s and the acharya, of the Supreme Self (Atman) within him, always calm and unaffected, the eternal Witness, and that this is his true nature. (See note 17, p. 37.) It is ever pure and perfect, infinite, blissful, beyond all changes, and beyond all ignorance. Gradually, through sadhana, when purification and tranquillity of *buddhi* (*dhatu-prasāda*) is achieved, he feels the grace of God (*Īśvara-anugraha*) from within, since *Īśvara*, the *Paramātman* (Supreme Self), is the Atman (Self) within all; he gives up attachment to his empirical ego and personality, and the Supreme Self reveals Itself to him (*tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṁ svām*).[25] Then the empirical person realizes that the Self is the Source of his very existence, life, and experience. With this realization and identification with the Self, the empirical personality disintegrates and the soul (*jīva*), which was only the reflection of the Atman in the limited *buddhi*, disappears into the Supreme Self, its Source,[26] just as the reflection of the sun in a bowl of water, when the bowl is broken, disappears and the sun alone remains in all its glory.[27] This is Liberation (*Mukti*), realizing the identity of the Self with the Absolute. However, the game of the universe continues for the other *jīva*s in *saṁsāra*.

8. Maya: The Principle of Relativity

Now, how does all this come about? What is the philosophical view? Why does the universe arise and Brahman appear as *Īśvara*, and how does the Self get associated with bodies, and why this

---

25 *Muṇ. Up.* 3.1.1–3, 3.2.3; and *Kaṭha Up.* 1.2.20, 22

26 *Muṇ. Up.* 3.2.4–9. A sadhaka following *jñāna-mārga*, who wants to realize the identity of the Self with Brahman, must give up his *jīva*-hood, and a *sādhaka* following the *bhakti-mārga* may consider the Supreme Self as *Īśvara*, and attain Him, i.e. as long as he has *jīva*-hood, he can see the Supreme Self as *Īśvara* only, and not as the Absolute Brahman.

27 Cf. *Vivek.* 565; also *Hastāmalaka Stotra*: *"Ya eko vibhāti svataḥ śuddhacetaḥ, prakāśasvarūpo'pi nānā-iva dhīṣu; śarāvodakastho yathā bhānuḥ ekaḥ, sa nityopalabdhi-svarūpo'hamātmā."* See also *Brahmabindu Up.* 12, 13.

game of the universe of bondage and freedom? Really, the questions why and when cannot be logically asked of non-dual Brahman, which is beyond words and thought, beyond time, space, and causation, Absolute and Infinite. They can be pertinently asked only of entities within time-space-causation. But we are part of the game within time, space, and causation, and cannot ask the question, just as a person within a dream cannot ask questions about the dream itself. However, we have to admit the Absolute, for we can understand the relative only in the background of the Absolute. And the fact remains that at present we find ourselves in an universe of experience, and we are conscious of ourselves as living within it; and bondage and freedom too, as described above, are facts of empirical experience. We can only analyze our experiences and those of the seers recorded in the scriptures and contemplate on them rationally to arrive at a systematic philosophical understanding of those facts. And towards that end, from the empirical point of view, an indefinable Power of Brahman (*anirvacanīya śakti*) designated as Maya is posited as the causal factor to explain the whole process of projection of the universe *without infringing the absoluteness of Brahman.* It is the postulated principle of differentiation, which by its nature is relative. That is, Maya is a fact from the empirical point of view, for we experience its effects in its products which are also of a relative nature. But Maya is not Maya to Brahman, just as fire is not hot to itself. It is its nature. None can say whether Maya really exists as an independent entity, just as none can say whether fire is really hot in itself, or gold is yellow in itself. These are our experiences. Similar is the case with Maya. This is its relativity—it exists from the phenomenal point of view, but is not cognized from the noumenal point of view.

We may, therefore, describe Maya as Brahman's innate and natural, inseparable, spontaneous power of appearing as many, appearing as the universe with its beings. We can only infer Maya from its effect—this universe of experience (*kāryānumeyā sudhiyaiva*

māyā) says Shankara.[28] Though we experience Maya through its effect, the universe of multiplicities, it is not a separate entity existing independently apart from Brahman (Advaita), any more than the waves can exist apart from the ocean. They are integral to the ocean, though we speak of the ocean and its waves, *as if* both are separate. Maya, being the posited cause of time, space, and causation, is itself beyond them (*parā*), and questions within time-space-causation cannot be asked about it either, just as in the case of Brahman, of which it is conceived as the innate Power. And further, just as Absolute Brahman is *sat-cit-ānanda* from the phenomenal point of view, Maya too is conceived from the phenomenal point of view as being of the nature of *sattva-rajas-tamas* (*triguṇātmikā*).

From the noumenal point of view, the description of '*neti, neti*' applies to Maya also. We can illustrate it thus: Gold is glittering yellow to our eyes and is valuable to us in our life. In itself, who can say what it is? It has no colour or glitter to the touch etc. It has no value to a baby or an animal. To the physicist it is only protons and electrons in a particular combination. These are mere relativistic conditional statements, real from a particular point of view only. Again, the sun is brilliant to the eyes and enables them to see. But if the eyes are not there, who can say whether the sun is really brilliant? The ears do not know it as brilliant. Further, our idea of the sun is conditioned by distance, our astronomical and scientific knowledge, etc. Again, a book in itself is simply cut and bound paper, with ink spread on it in a particular way. It contains knowledge only to those who know the language and script symbolized in it. The 'book' itself does not know anything; for white ants it is only food. Thus 'we take out what we have put in'—that is, all empirical knowledge is valid from a particular point or points of view. Similarly, our experience of the nature of Maya and all its products is relative to, and is conditioned by, the state of our knowledge of Re-

---

28 *Vivek.* 108: *"Avyaktanāmnī parameśa śaktiḥ anādyavidyā triguṇātmikā parā, kāryānumeyā sudhiyaiva māyā yayā jagat-sarvamidam prasūyate."* See Appendix A, *Note on Maya and Its Cognates*)

ality. As such, who can say what Maya really is in itself noumenally, and what its nature is from an unconditional absolute point of view in the non-dual state? And who is there to assert anything about Maya when there is no personality or experience of the universe in the deep-sleep state or in samadhi, as long as one is in that state?[29] That is why Shankara says Maya is *anirvacanīya rūpā.*[30]

Thus, Maya-power, being the principle of relativity, is experienced in some states and not experienced in others. But though Maya, which is posited as an empirical fact, can be negated as an experienced fact in a particular state, the awareness of the Self (Atman) is always there; none can ever in any state negate Brahman as Atman, because It is his very Self, the Ground of all experience. Even to assert Its absence, one must be there to witness Its absence. However, Maya is certainly experienced as long as the phenomenal personality is there and the universe is perceived, just as gold is yellow and valuable to us in life whatever it be in itself, or to the animals, or to scientists. The fire may not feel itself to be hot, but others do feel and describe it as hot.

9. The Basis of Our Empirical Activities

We may recall here again that we philosophize only in the waking state from within a given so-called 'universe', with a personality,

---

29 However, during the dualistic waking state, we can say: From the absolute point of view there is no Maya because there is nothing other than Brahman or the Infinite. In the state of deep sleep or *suṣupti* there is no experience of any kind because of the dissociation of the cognizer, the *pramātā.* But the resumption of the pre-sleep identity after waking up and the memory regarding that deep-sleep state of 'not knowing anything', which occurs in the waking condition, are accepted as evidence of the persistence there of the *sākṣī* which was aware of *Ignorance* as the only object. Similarly, the memory of the realization (the indivisible mental state *akhaṇḍākāra vṛtti*), which persists after the realizational experience, is considered sufficient to sublate the reality of all subsequent *vṛtti*s, or mental modifications .

30 *Vivek.* 109: *"Sat nā api, asat nā api, ubhayātmikā no, bhinnā api, abhinnā api, ubhayātmikā no; sāṅgā api, anaṅgā hi, ubhayātmikā no, mahā-adbhutā anirvacanīya rūpā."*

the exact natures of which we do not know, and have not adequate means of knowing. Our knowledge of ourselves and the universe is very meagre, highly imperfect, and conditional. And further, both being in a constant state of flux, it is impossible to determine even their empirical nature with any certainty or exactitude. Even our so-called scientific knowledge has been continually changing. Our relations with other empirical persons are also of the same kind. We merely describe in vague words these conditional or constantly changing phenomena as they appear to us from time to time, like the constantly changing clouds on the screen of the sky.

However, since there is the unchanging Absolute Reality (Brahman) behind all phenomena, It gives them a sort of unity or continuity in space-time; and since no one is devoid of a glimpse of that Reality intuitively, as the Self within, we try to investigate Its real nature by means of observation, reason, contemplation, meditation, scriptural testimony of transcendental experience, and other attested devices. We have a dim intuitive awareness of our real Self as the pure Subject, and an imperfect conditional knowledge of the objective universe and of our psycho-physical personality, which is a part of it, which are not-Self, being objects; and all our physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual activities proceed as a result of mutual mixing up of or superimposing (*adhyāsa*) the two, the Self and the not-Self. This is a patent fact of experience, giving rise to the notions of 'I' and 'mine' with regard to the psycho-physical personality and the objects of perception associated with it. This mutual superimposition, being a natural fact (not intentional), has neither beginning nor end, and is characterized by false notions (owing to the mixing up of the Self and the not-Self). This engenders the sense of agentship and enjoyership which is open to observation by all.[31] When one realizes the true nature of the Self through

---

31 See *Br. Sū. Bhā.* intro.: "*Yuṣmad-asmad-pratyaya-gocarayoḥ viṣaya-viṣayiṇoḥ . . . anyonyasmin anyonyātmakatām anyonya dharmāṅśca adhyasya itaretara avivekena . . . satyānṛte mithunīkṛtya ahaṁ-idam mama-idam iti naisargiko'yam loka-vyavahāraḥ. . . . Tametam avidyākhyam ātmā-anātmanoḥ*

investigation by proper means, the superimposition ceases for him, and the empirical personality disintegrates.[32]

10. Our Empirical Knowledge and Superimposition

The description of Maya—that it has two aspects of *āvaraṇa-śakti* (veiling power) and *vikṣepa-śakti* (projecting power), that it is *triguṇātmikā*, and that it projects the universe and its beings spontaneously by covering up the Reality (Brahman)—is an inferential empirical description on the analogy of our universal experience of sleep and dream, based on the analysis of the universe which is comprised of the three *guṇas*.[33] Ultimately, all knowledge and conclusions have to be related to reason and universal experience. They cannot be based on mere conjecture or personal 'revelation' of any 'prophet'. Accordingly, the phenomenal universe of our experi-

itaretara adhyāsam puraskṛtya sarve pramāṇa-prameya vyavahārāḥ laukikāḥ vaidikāśca pravṛttāḥ, sarvāṇi ca śāstrāṇi vidhi-pratiṣedha-mokṣaparāṇi. . . . Evam ayam anādirananto naisargiko adhyāso mithyā-pratyaya-rūpaḥ kartṛtva-bhoktṛtva-pravartakaḥ sarvaloka-pratyakṣaḥ."

32 It is not possible for anyone to investigate the nature of the whole universe in detail, but we know that it is an experiential *object*, distinct from the experiencing *subject*, the Pure Self, and can have meaning only in relation to the Self. However, since our personality also is a part of the universe, it is possible for us, by separating the subject and object in our personality, to reach the Pure Self. Then we realize that behind all personalities and the universe is the same Self (Atman), objectively designated as Brahman. Atman is Brahman seen through the aperture of one's personality, like seeing a part of the infinite sky through the window, thought it is not a part, but the same infinite sky.

When the Atman is associated with the personality, owing to Its reflection in the *buddhi* as consciousness (*caitanya*), and is mistakenly seen as limited, like the vast sun reflected in a small mirror, it is called *jīva*. By knowing the real nature of the *jīva*, one realizes the real nature of oneself as Atman/Brahman.

Cf. *Chā. Up.* 6.1.4: *"Yathā soumya ekena mṛtpiṇḍena sarvaṁ mṛṇmayaṁ vijñātam syāt vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam mṛttikā ityeva satyam."* See also *Muṇ. Up.* 3.2.5–9

33 The projection of the dream-universe is possible only when our waking consciousness is covered up in sleep. Then the mind spontaneously projects the dream-universe. The empirical person does not will it.

ence as a whole may be supposed to have arisen from the Absolute Brahman effortlessly and spontaneously, just like the dream in our case, due to Its power of Maya.

And we who find ourselves within the realm of this given empirical universe of time, space, and causation can, for its systematic understanding and for the co-ordination of its functioning, apply rational, scientific, philosophic, moral, and religious principles, such as *satkārya-vāda* (the effect is the manifestation of an existing cause), *kalpa* (cyclic evolution and involution of the universe), *dharma-adharma* (righteousness and unrighteousness), *karma-punarjanma* (karma and rebirth), *svarga-naraka* (heaven and hell), *bandha-mokṣa* (bondage and liberation), etc. We can apply these principles from the temporal and spatial points of view, regarding the details of the processes and functioning of the universe, in the context of our empirical experience and thought. It is just like finding order, development, co-ordination, ethical and aesthetic values, etc. within a great literary fiction, though the whole plan, plot, story, events, and characters within it are the product of the author's mind. It may also be compared to taking a photograph of a scene, and painting that same scene on a canvas bit by bit. Brahman is the effortless poet (*kavi*) of this poetic universe through Its power of Maya.[34] And Brahman being the Supreme Reality and Truth, relatively speaking, nothing that emerges from It can be haphazard, irrational, or jarring. So it is possible empirically to investigate and formulate systematic views of the universe which are relatively valid.

However, all these are our empirical views of the Reality in time and space, and do not represent Its noumenal nature. Though as empirical beings within the universe we are not the locus of the

---

34 When Brahman is looked upon as *Īśvara*, then we call the projection of the universe as His *līlā* (sportive play) through His power of Maya. *Līlā* is the spontaneous expression of *Īśvara's* Blissful (*ānanda*) nature, as in the case of an infant's play, without any motive. *Īśvara* being *āptakāma*, He has no desires. (Cf. *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* 1.9: *Devasya-eṣa svabhāvo'yam āptakāmasya kā spṛhā.*)

universe (we are the locus only of our private dream-universes), and have not created or projected it, being ourselves a part of it, we can and do superimpose our limited and imperfect empirical notions of the universe on the universe itself as well as on the Reality (Brahman), and we superimpose similar imperfect notions of our empirical personality on ourselves and on the Self (Atman).[35] And with these notions all our activities proceed. The exact nature of this universe and of ourselves cannot be determined, for they are indeterminate and in a constant state of flux, and appear differently in different states of mind to ourselves and to different types of beings. They partake of the relativistic nature of Maya, which is their source and stuff. But in and through both—the universe and ourselves—we are always dimly aware of something unchanging and permanent, which endows these with continuity, meaning, and substance. And that is Brahman or Atman, the Unchanging Witness-Self (*sākṣī*), not affected by the effects of Maya, like fire by its own heat, Maya being Brahman's own expression (*sākṣī cetā kevalo nirguṇaśca*).[36] We realize the true nature of the Self, our own being, by going beyond the effects of Maya, the pairs of opposites, through proper spiritual disciplines.

It should be noted here that the universe with its beings does not arise because we superimpose them on Brahman or the Self, *as is mistakenly thought of by some*. This is an absurd position. On the contrary: according to our various and ever-changing empirical notions, we always superimpose *our conceptions* of the universe and an equally enigmantic personality with which we find ourselves associated (the real nature of both of which we do not know) on Brahman and the Self respectively. It is illustrated by the common

---

35 It is a common fact that we superimpose our own notions regarding other persons, things and events on those persons, things and events according to our mental and physical development, attitudes, attachments, and aversions. That is why several conflicting opinions become current regarding a person, thing, or event, each judging according to his own notions. A person does not even know what exactly he is now, or what he will be later on.

36 *Śve. Up.* 6.11; cf. also 6.8; 4.1, 9, 10)

experience of our superimposing, unwittingly, the notion of a snake on the not-clearly-visible rope in semi-darkness. When we bring in light and see clearly, we find the rope only; *the notion of snake with regard to the rope disappears.* That does not mean snakes do not exist. *But it was not there where we had thought it was.* It was not snake but rope only. It may also be illustrated by the *'Cinema show of Maya'* on the screen of Brahman, which does not affect Brahman, and when the show is over, the screen remains as it was before. Similarly, in the transcendental state, when one has realized one's true nature as Atman or Brahman, no universe is cognized in Brahman and no personality in Atman; there is only Pure Awareness of the Self (*Prajñānaṁ Brahma*). But, empirically speaking, the appearance of the universe and the personality may continue to be experienced by others who have not realized the Truth, since the universe is beginningless and endless and is not the projection of any person within the universe; everyone finds themselves in it.[37]

---

37 As already pointed out, when one has transcended the empirical personality and is identified with the Self, one transcends the effects of Maya also. In the Self, which is Brahman, Its Maya-power ceases to be Maya, just as fire is not hot to itself. In the realized state of the Self, no Maya or its product, the universe, is cognized. Only the pure Self-awareness remains. However, empirically speaking, Maya and the universe may be cognized by other empirical persons who are a part of it. These are two different states, the Noumenal and the phenomenal, the Absolute and the relative, which stand distinct and unrelated. In the empirical realm, we can have an idea of it by comparing the deep-sleep state and waking-state experiences.

Some thinkers argue that to superimpose the idea of snake on the rope, we must have the knowledge of a pre-existing snake. Similarly, the universe must be pre-existent to superimpose it on Brahman. Shankara does not dispute it. The universe of our experience is ever-existent like the shining power of light, since Maya is the eternal inseparable Power of Brahman. But just as the brilliance of light is seen by the eyes only, similarly the universe is apprehended only by the empirical beings within it. They do not know the real nature of either the universe or themselves, and they superimpose their notions of the universe on Brahman, and of themselves on Atman.

Gold as gold remains unaffected by the ornaments we have shaped out of it, the methodology by which they were shaped, and our descriptions and evaluations of them. In the case of gold which has parts, it is actually

However, the problem before us is not the establishment of the reality of the universe *per se*—for everyone naturally takes it as real (See note 44, p. 69)—but to find out its true nature, the nature of Reality, and the real nature of our Self, to enable us to go beyond all limitations of our fleeting empirical existence. No one will be interested in establishing the reality of the dream-universe and of one's dream personality, either for oneself or for the other beings in the dream, after one has woken up, even though they were experienced as real as long as the dream lasted. Similarly, once the Truth is realized, no one will be interested in establishing the reality or existence of the world. The problem of the existence of the universe loses all meaning. Solutions based on merely empirical reasoning do not apply to the noumenal Reality, though they may be useful for systematizing our thought empirically.

Empirically, we really do not know, and cannot know because of natural limitations, whether this universe which is experienced was even projected by the Maya-power of Brahman, though we philosophically posit it, for it is relatively valid. Nor can we say that our real Self is this ever-changing personality process, for we are intuitively aware that we are the constant unchanging Witness of the ever-changing personality. Shankara points out that the pure subject and the object can never be mixed up except due to the non-comprehension of their distinction due to *metaphysical ignorance* (*avidyā*) which is removed by the *metaphysical knowledge* of the real nature of the Self (*vidyā*).[38] It is only due to this natural (*naisargika*)

---

modified (*pariṇāma*), and in the case of the infinite partless Brahman, it is only apparently modified through superimposition (*vivarta*) by our minds.

38 See Shankara's introduction to his *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*. Because of the intuitive cognition of the Self as oneself, which is never lost—though it be vague, and mixed up with the external psycho-physical sheaths covering it—it can be made clear by scriptural teaching and appropriate spiritual sadhana (under the guidance of a qualified guru). And it is possible to overcome this *avidyā*, the effect of Maya, and our own superimposed notions, and realize the true nature of the Self and Its identity with Brahman which leads to *Mukti* from relative existence as the *jīva*. This is *vidyā*. The

superimposition or mutual admixture engendered by *avidyā*, the origin of which we do not know, that the subject and the object are related; and we, as empirical beings, function in this universe and go on elaborating our relativistic conceptions with regard to the Reality in different philosophical, religious, rational, scientific, and various other systems according to the different viewpoints we take. (See note 31, page 58.)

11. *Avidyā, Īśvara*, and *Jīva*

We have, therefore, two types of experiences of the Reality (for no one can deny an ultimate Reality or Existence (*Sat*), whether the empirical universe and our personality within it be considered 'real' or 'apparent', since there must be some conscious entity to which they appear): one, the transcendental Absolute described in the scriptures and intuitively perceived by us as the Pure Subject or Self, which is realized by spiritual geniuses im-mediately, that is without the mediation of the mind (*aparokṣa-anubhūti*); and the other, the relative universe as the object of our experience. The gap between the two can never be bridged logically (*tarka*); it is an impossibility springing from their different natures. They are two different orders of experience of Reality, the transcendental and the empirical, which are experienced in two different states.[39] In the Absolute experience, there is no relative; and in the relative experience, we cannot experience the Absolute, though the relative state presupposes the Absolute. This inevitable non-comprehensibility of the relationship between the two states is designated as *avidyā* or *ajñāna*,

---

Self being ever Pure, Perfect, and Free, this *vidyā* is also within the realm of Maya, but leads to *Mukti*, just as *avidyā* leads to *saṁsāra*. "A pricked thorn is removed by a free thorn." Thus both *vidyā* and *avidyā* are within the scheme of Maya. It is the empirical person who is in bondage and it is he who is liberated; the real Self is in its own nature ever-free, being infinite (*Nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāva*).

39 The common factor between the two types of experiences is therefore the Experiencer. By realizing this Experiencer as one's true Self, one goes beyond the Absolute and the relative.

non-knowledge or ignorance, which has nothing to do with empirical knowledge and ignorance. *Avidyā* is metaphysical in nature. This *avidyā* is the effect of the veiling power (*āvaraṇa-śakti*) of the transcendent Maya, logically indescribable (*anirvacanīya*). And it is because of this veiling power of Maya which hides the Truth that we get attached to empirical existence.

This Maya is in a way imponderable to us; but by virtue of its innate nature, like the radiation of heat by fire, it spontaneously projects the phenomenal universe and its beings through its projecting power (*vikṣepa-śakti*), without infringing the nature of the Absolute. We, empirical persons who are accustomed to thinking of events in terms of cause and effect due to the operation of the natural *avidyā*, think of the unrelatable universe as related to Brahman. Then Brahman is conceived as *Saguṇa* Brahman or *Īśvara*, the Universal Self (*Viśvātman*), and Lord of the universe, and thought of as existing in the whole universe. Similarly, Atman (i.e. Brahman intuited as the Self behind the individual personalities in the universe), is conceived of as the *jīva*, the soul and the lord of the body, and we view it as associated with the body and existing within, in the core of our personality. Transcendentally, Brahman and Atman are identical. But empirically, as the universe of multiplicity and its beings intervene, Brahman as personal *Īśvara* (*Saguṇa* Brahman) is viewed by us as the Projector of the universe, using Maya as His power; and *jīva* is viewed as the actor and experiencer (*kartā, bhoktā*) in the universe. At this stage, *Īśvara* is also thought of as immanent in, and Inner Controller (*Antaryāmīn*) of the universe, and is looked upon as the Oversoul (*Paramātman*) of which the individual souls (*jīvātman*) are parts.

12. Is the Postulate of Maya Necessary?

It may be asked here: Instead of positing an imponderable relativistic Maya-power of Brahman as a link between the Absolute and the relative, why not posit two realities, one unchanging and another changing, both equally valid from the same standpoint? Even then, we need

an explanation as to how they are related and how the unchanging can act at all on the changing or *vice versa*![40] Also, the *śruti* declares Reality as one and non-dual (*ekameva advitīyam*), that it is beyond all positive affirmations as an object (*neti, neti*); and that the universe and its beings emerge from It, stay in It, and merge back into It, without affecting It. This view of Maya is not inherently contradictory to reason and experience, since according to it, Maya is inferred from its own effects, and the Absolute is realizable transcendentally.

Then, one may say, why not consider the Absolute and the relative as inseparable real parts of the same One Total Reality, one part unchanging and another changing? But how are these parts distinguished? How do they mutually interact? How are they related to the total entity? Is the change substantial (that is, in the substance) or unsubstantial? If it be substantial, how does it retain its identity in the midst of change? If it has no identity, how can the change be related to it, and how can it be called as an entity or a part of totality? If it retains its identity, how can the change be called 'real' (*satya*)? Hence we have to say that It has simply assumed different names and forms for the time being.[41] Again, the Infinite cannot have parts, and the totality of parts cannot make an entity Infinite.

---

40 If we admit two realities, then we will have to posit a third one which comprehends both of them, since each will limit the other. Further, we will have to posit a changing power in the Unchanging to act on the changing. If it be supposed that the changing acts on the Unchanging, it can seem to act only through superimposition and not really, since the Unchanging cannot be acted upon. Hence it is logical to hold that Maya-power appears as the changing universe, which we superimpose on Brahman, conceiving It as the active projector *Īśvara*.

41 Cf. *Chā. Up.* 6.1.4: *"Vācāraṁbhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam mṛttiketyeva satyam."* Shankara also accepts, from the phenomenal point of view, Maya as the 'material cause' that has projected, i.e. assumed all the names and forms. And Maya being Brahman's inseparable Power, the Infinite Absolute Brahman is always the substratum of all names and forms, giving them substance and reality. The names and forms are only transient appearances on the Reality without any independent existential reality. Hence such apparent modification is termed *vivarta*, as against *pariṇāma*, which is real modification.

Thus whether this changing entity is considered as a part of the One Reality or a distinct entity, the above questions and several other logical difficulties still remain.

Then, some may suggest, we may consider the changing aspect as the power of the unchanging Reality. But this is what is accepted by Shankara, and the power is designated as Maya, the relativistic Power that apparently projects the changing universe, without affecting the changeless Absolute.

We all do intuitively feel our permanent identity in the midst of constant change. Since this change is empirically unceasing, one state conditioning another without any fixity, it is called *'unreal'* (*mithyā*), though we seem to experience it as 'real' because of the unchanging Brahman behind these changes.[42] Again, in Self-knowledge there is no experience of Maya or its effects. Maya is experienced in Maya only. A dream is experienced in dream only. The Infinite or the Absolute does not feel the absence of the finite or the relative; it is the finite and the relative which feel the presence of the Infinite and the Absolute as their background. So from the transcendental point of view, Maya ceases to exist for the realized;

---

42 *Mithyā* or false is not absolute unreality, but a mixture of the Absolute Real with the relative real, or the unreal. The unreal passes away, but the Reality which gave it substance and made its experience possible alone endures, as in the case of the ocean and the waves. *Satya-anṛte mithunī kṛtya* is *mithyā*. The point is, whether those changeful phenomena are described as 'unreal' or 'real'—from the noumenal or the phenomenal points of view—the characteristics and the experience of the world and their relative validity remains the same for all empirically.

The idea of *mithyā* may be further clarified thus: *mithyā* or false does not mean *non-existent* but *unreal*. Since Reality is Infinity, real is infinite. Therefore, anything finite is not real, but conditional. Infinity again can be conceived in three ways: in time, in space, and in substance (*kālataḥ*, *deśataḥ*, and *vastutaḥ*). Any limitation in any of these ways would impair infinity. So anything that is thus limited in any way—i.e. it exists at some time and not at some other time; it exists somewhere and not elsewhere; or it is something and not something else—has limited conditional existence, and is therefore unreal or false. If a necklace of gold is melted, the necklace disappears, but the gold remains.

while from the empirical point of view, it is experienced.[43] Shankara points out that the reality we experience in the midst of this constant change is that of the unchanging Brahman, which is the substratum for this play of change, play of Maya. And Brahman is pure Consciousness (*Prajñānam Brahma*).

Why not, some may say, leave aside bothering too much with logic, and simply accept as ultimate fact that there is a changeful eternal 'real entity', which is an aspect of the infinite unchanging *Īśvara*, or is separately under His control, which manifests as the universe under His direction, and as the *jīvas*—either as real eternal parts of *Īśvara*, or as separate entities dependent on Him? Yes, one can. It is a beautiful conception liked by many. But it does violence to the non-dual, non-personal, and absolutistic *śruti* statements; moreover, *it is not a philosophy of Truth, but popular theology*. It is a sentimental preference; for in several respectable, and even orthodox, rational philosophies and religions, both in India and outside, a personal creator-God is not even accepted, and many arguments are pressed against the existence of such a God. Even where God is accepted, the conceptions of God and His (or Her) relationship with the universe and its beings are varied. God is not a constant experience of all. The *objective* vision of God that some do have is a conditional one. Sri Ramakrishna, who had such visions, transcended them to reach the Ultimate Truth. But Brahman, as the Self, is within the constant intuitive experience of all, and cannot be philosophically denied. Further, in Shankara's philosophy there is an irrefutable place for God, *for He is nothing but Brahman as viewed from the empirical plane*. The different conceptions of God and the universe also are acceptable to Shankara as different viewpoints on the relative plane so far as

---

43 It is like our reflection in the mirror. As long as we are before the mirror, we see it; if we move away, or if the mirror is removed, our reflection in it disappears. In fact, even when we saw the reflection, it was not in the mirror; our own light came back reflected by the glass and we mistook it for our reflection in the mirror.

they conform to reason and universal experience on that plane, i.e. on the plane of Maya.

13. Can We Give Up *Īśvara* and the Universe?

Can we or shall we give up God and the universe as 'unreal'? No, says Shankara; wait, do not be in a hurry; you cannot give up—nor is it possible for you to give up—anything on the relative plane except what is not valid on that plane according to that plane's criteria, without first giving up your *relative empirical personality.*[44] As long as you are associated with a personality, the universe, of which it is a part, is also there, and you cannot but see and think of Brahman as the personal *Īśvara*, the Lord of the universe, and yourself as the *jīva*. What you are doing is right, and the *śruti* also supports it from the relative point of view. You can love and worship *Īśvara*, for you are dealing with *the same Absolute Reality*, empirically, in and through the condition of your personality, and not with any imaginarily projected entity or being. And that Reality, being spiritual, will respond to you in the way you approach it. From the conditional state, it is possible to conceive of the Absolute Reality as God in several different ways. But it is the same sugar that sweetens different dishes. Your experiences will continue, but you will grow in real Knowledge (*parā vidyā*).

An ordinary person on the earth thinks that the sun rises, moves in the sky, and sets, and makes for day and night. He thinks the sun is small, and is now hidden by the clouds; now its light is dimmed,

---

44 Cf. *Br. Sū. Bhā.* 2.1.14: "*Sarva vyavahārāṇām eva prāk brahmātmatā vijñānāt satyatva upapatteḥ; svapna vyavahārasya iva prāk prabodhāt. Yāvaddhi na satyātmaikatva pratipattiḥ tāvat pramāṇa-prameya-phala-lakṣaneṣu vikāreṣu anṛtattva-buddhiḥ na kasyacid upapadyate*"; and 1.1.4: "*Dehātma pratyayo yadvat pramāṇatvena kalpitaḥ, laukikam tadvadeva idam pramāṇam tu ātma niścayāt.*"

See also Shankara's introduction to the second chapter of the *Ait. Up.* for his approach to relative views, when he replies to the *pūrvapakṣīn*'s statement, "*Astu tarhi sarvamevedam anupapannam*—Let it then be that all this is untenable", refuting it.

etc. These experiences are true for all of us, and we also conduct our daily activities accordingly, but the explanations differ; the understanding and explanations of the ordinary man are incorrect. It is not true astronomy. We have to give up the geocentric view and adopt the heliocentric view. If we rise high up in the sky, we will realize that day and night are experiences conditioned by the earth. The sun neither rises nor sets; the sun is neither hidden nor loses its brilliance. These are our views from the earth; and yet the sun is necessary for all the phenomena to occur. Similarly, the conditioning of Maya makes the Absolute Brahman appear as *Īśvara-jīva-jagat* to us as empirical beings. The experiences are there, and are valid in the conditioned state, so long as our empirical personality and *jīva*-hood last.

But, then, one may ask, is not the oneness of Brahman vitiated, by positing a second entity called Maya? No, answers Shankara, for, firstly, it is the inseparable Power of Brahman. It is not other than Brahman and hence non-different from It.[45] Maya is experienced by us in the empirical state only, and our existence as empirical persons is an ever-changing phase that ceases. Secondly, he does not posit empirically Absolute Oneness, but Non-duality (*a-dvaita*) i.e. what we experience as separate is nothing but Brahman (*abhedam vakṣyāmaḥ, na tu ekatvam*), just as water, ice, and vapour are the same H_2O. Thirdly, when one has realized the Self by shedding the personality, and duality is transcended, then in the words of the *śruti*: "What should one see and through what, what should one know and through what, when everything has become the Atman?"[46] As already pointed out, no Maya is experienced then, just as fire is not hot to itself. It is only those who are in Maya that experience it.

---

45 *Gītā Bhā.* 14.27: "*Śakti-śaktimatoḥ ananyatvāt*—because power and the one whose power it is are non-different."

46 *Bṛh. Up.* 2.4.14: "*Yatra hi dvaitam iva bhavati . . . taditara itaraṁ paśyati . . . yatra vā asya sarvam ātmaivābhūt . . . tat kena kam paśyet . . . tat kena kam vijānīyāt?*"

14. Brahman and *Īśvara* are the Same Reality

Thus from the empirical point of view, Brahman with its Power of Maya is designated *Īśvara* (God), who is the material and efficient cause of the whole universe. The Absolute Brahman is called *Nirupādhika* or *Nirguṇa Brahman*, i.e. Brahman as It is, without the phenomenal adjuncts and characteristics of *Prakṛti* attributed by us; and *Īśvara* is called *sopādhika* or *Saguṇa* Brahman, i.e. Brahman with the totality of all the phenomenal adjuncts and attributes. They are also designated *Para-Brahman* and *apara-Brahman*, which do not signify higher and lower, as is mistakenly thought of by some, for they are not related, and neither are they two Realities, but *the same Reality* in Its transcendent and relative aspects, as viewed by us. It is not that Brahman has become *Īśvara*: the Absolute Infinite Brahman is beyond the reach of thought or conceptualization, and *Īśvara* is the highest concept we can ever have of it. And this very conceptualization makes Brahman appear as if finite, just as the sun which we will not be able to visualize at very close range, appears to be round and small from the earth. All functioning is possible only at, and up to, this level.

From the relative point of view Brahman is conceived as personal *Īśvara*, and He possesses Maya (*māyādhīśa* or *māyīn*) as His active Power, under His control; with Maya He projects the universe through its *triguṇas*.[47] He is the Supreme Soul (*Paramātman*) of the universe, which is like unto His body, and hence He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is immanent in the universe as *Īśvara*, and transcendent as Brahman. *Īśvara* controls the universe from within (*Antaryāmin*) as its Soul. As long as we have attachment to our personality, Reality as *Īśvara* is more important to us than Reality as Absolute Brahman. We can approach *Īśvara* easily, through love, and receive His grace. It is very difficult to give up

---

47 Cf. *Śve Up.* 1.3; 4.9–10

attachment to personality without hard spiritual disciplines over many births.[48]

15. Empirically Different Views of *Īśvara-Jīva-Jagat* Acceptable

It is, however, possible to conceive of *Īśvara*'s relationship to the universe and living beings (*jīvātmans*) in various ways, as has been done by the various dualistic schools. All these are acceptable as different conceptions from different points of view; all of them are relatively valid from their respective viewpoints, being based on logical arguments with relative merits.[49]

Sri Ramanuja, for example, conceives *Īśvara* as the Supreme Person (*Puruṣottama*) with the whole universe as His body, made of *pure subtle substance* (*śuddha-sattva*). The souls (*jīvas*) are his inseparable parts (*aṁśa*), like rays of the sun, and He is the Supreme Soul (*Paramātman*) of the entire universe and its beings—the central Sun immanent in the universe-body. For the embodied person,

---

48 Cf. *Gītā* 12.5: *"Kleśodhikatarasteṣām avyaktāsakta cetasām, avyaktā hi gatirduḥkhaṁ dehavadbhir avāpyate"*; also, *Kaṭha Up.* 1.3.14: *"Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata, kṣurasya-dhārā niśitā duratyayā durgaṁ pathaḥ tat kavayo vadanti"*; *Ibid.* 2.1.1: *"Parāñcikhāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūḥ, tasmāt parāk-paśyati na antarātman"*; *Vivek.* 2: *"Muktiḥ no śata-janma-koṭisukṛtaiḥ punyaiḥ vinā labhyate."*

Absolute Brahman has to be realized generally through one's own efforts, just like realizing Impersonal Truth. However, one may reach It through the grace of *Īśvara* also, since Brahman alone appears as *Īśvara*. Hence devotion to *Īśvara* is advocated even for those who wish to realize the Absolute Brahman, to make the path somewhat easy. Cf. *Kaṭha Up.* 1.2.20: *"Aṇoraṇīyān mahataḥ mahīyān ātmā'syajantoḥ-nihitaḥ guhāyām; tamakratuḥ paśyati vītaśokaḥ dhātuḥ prasādāt mahimānam ātmanaḥ"*; *Vivek.* 476: *"Taṭasthitā bodhayanti guravaḥ śrutayo yathā, prajñayā eva taret vidvān Īśvara-anugṛhītayā."*

49 It can be compared to the different types of constitutions of states—monarchic, republican, etc., with different types of relationships between the head of the state, the assembly, the citizens, etc. We may also compare it to the same person being looked upon as a son, a husband, a father, a brother, an uncle, etc. by different members of the family and behaving in appropriate ways towards him according to their relationship.

the Supreme Soul may appear transcendent, though *Īśvara* is not transcendent to the universe. Shankara has no objection to accepting this view or other dualistic views empirically for purposes of love and worship, as they are all relative views of the same Absolute Brahman, and therefore are valid.[50]

The Advaitic schools of philosophy, on the relative plane, conceive of Brahman with the adjunct (*upādhi*) of the universe of multiplicity projected by its Maya-power, as *Īśvara*; and with the *upādhi* of individualized psycho-physical organisms as *jīva*s. Brahman, transcending the *upādhi*s, is intuitively apprehended as the Self or Atman by the embodied person.[51] Just as *Īśvara* is no other than

---

50 Cf. *Br. Sū. Bhā.* 1.1.12, intro.: *"Eka eva tu paramātmā Īśvaraḥ taistaiḥ guṇa-viśeṣaiḥ viśiṣṭaḥ upāsyaḥ . . ."*; 1.2.14: *"Nirguṇamapi sat brahma nāmarūpagataiḥ guṇaiḥ saguṇam upāsanārtham tatra tatra upadiśyate."*

It may be noted that at a time when the concept and the existence of an external creator God was widely rejected by several important religions and philosophies, it was Shankara who gave a firm philosophic basis for the conception of God by showing that God was the relative view of Brahman-Atman, and as such was an existential Reality; hence He could be conceived of and approached in various ways, under different names and forms. 'The conception of God is phenomenal' does not mean 'God does not exist'. *He always exists as the Eternal Brahman*, only our conceptions of Him undergo changes *pari passu* with the change in the conception of our own personality, of our Self, and of the universe. Brahman as *Īśvara* responds to us in the way we approach Him (*Gītā* 4.11: *Ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tān tathaiva bhajāmyaham*), just as a steel piece made into a sword, knife, needle, or wheel serves as such. Being two aspects of the same Reality, there is no rivalry between Brahman and *Īśvara*, though the *sādhaka*s, who are anxious to promote their own ideals, may go on disputing their relative superiority.

In his commentary on *Br. Sū.* 1.1.12 (introduction), Shankara reiterates: *"Evam ekam api Brahma apekṣitopādhi-saṁbandham nirastopādhi-saṁbandham ca upāsyattvena jñeyatvena ca vedānteṣu upadiśyate."*

He also considers that, from the relative point of view, *the ever-existent Īśvara* alone is the sole projector and operator of the universe: *"Jagad vyāpārastu nityasiddhasya Īśvarasya"* (*Br. Sū. Bhā.* 4.4.17); *"Sarva vedānteṣu ca Īśvarahetukā eva sṛṣṭayo vyapadiśyante"* (3.2.41).

51 In this view, Brahman-Atman is always transcendent to both the universe and the individual personality, is not affected by the adjuncts, which are the

Brahman with the whole universe as His *upādhi*, the *jīva*s are also nothing but Brahman with individualized *upādhi*s, which are parts of the universe. Thus *Īśvara* and *jīva* are inter-related phenomenally, as whole and part. The ground and substance of the universe is also nothing but Brahman. The pure Absolute Brahman appears to us as this triad of *Īśvara-jīva-jagat* in the phenomenal state, while remaining noumenally in Its own Absolute nature.[52]

16. The Triangle of *Īśvara-Jīva-Jagat* is Relatively Eternal: It can be Transcended, not Eliminated

It is Brahman, the Reality Itself, which appears to us as all the three—*Īśvara-jīva-jagat*. They are the constituents, the three sides of the triangle of empirical existence, which are interlinked and always go together. One cannot wish them away, as one has not created them. But one can transcend them by the realization of Atman-Brahman as one's real Self, by giving up one's empirical personality—just as,

---

products of Its Maya-power—just as the magician is not affected by his own magic—and remains Absolute. But when they are viewed empirically as *Īśvara* and *jīva* by us, we see them possessing all the characteristics that are attributed to them in the dualistic systems. Just as the origin of the universe and the bondage of the *jīva* is a mystery, how the *jīva* transcends them and realizes its Selfhood is also a mystery, but it happens when we follow the sadhana prescribed in the *śruti*s, for the Self reveals Itself (*tasya eṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūm svām*). For that matter, we are surrounded by mysteries. How a tree produces a seed, and how that seed again reproduces a similar tree, is also an unsolved mystery, though we may advance subtler and subtler scientific explanations. A *jīva* may be figuratively compared to a 'seed' of the Brahman-tree, i.e. potential Brahman, from which again Brahman is manifested in full. (Cf. *Pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇam-udacyate . . .*)

52 This may be illustrated thus: An actor, all the while remaining himself, impersonates some other character in a drama. Before, during, and after the role, he is the same person. (Cf. *Br. Sū. Bhā.* 2.1.18: *Mūlakāraṇam* (*Brahma*) *eva antyāt kāryāt tena tena kāryākāreṇa natavat sarva-vyavahārāspadatvam pratipadyate*).

The relation between *Īśvara* and *jīva* is like that of the general electric power supply to the city, and the current drawn from it for use in individual houses. The power is one and the same.

though one cannot avoid the effect of gravitation on earth, one can transcend it by going beyond its range. This clearly shows that *Īśvara* never ceases to exist on the phenomenal plane. Only the phenomenal *Īśvara-jīva-jagat* relationship is transcended by the illumined by realizing the identity of their Self with Brahman, which is the source of this triad.

What happens to the illumined then? The wave merges into the ocean. It ceases as the wave, but exists as the Ocean. As such, it is only when a *jīva* transcends time, space, and causation, or Maya, and is identified with the Atman or Absolute Brahman, that the empirical *jīva* ceases. The universe and *Īśvara* continue to be there for other *jīva*s. As long as a person retains his *jīva*-hood, *Īśvara* and the universe also are there for him, and a bhakta can retain his *jīva*-hood forever in time. *Īśvara*-hood, *jīva*-hood, and the universe are mutual correlates and cease not in time, but with time; not in space, but with space.[53] The *jīva-Īśvara* relationship endures as long as time

---

53 Brahman—the Absolute Reality—and the universe are not brought into existence by us. Rather, we find ourselves as part of the universe. We, as empirical beings in the universe, cannot experience the Absolute unless we transcend our empirical personality, though we have an intuitive glimpse of It within us as the Witness-Self or pure Subject, since the Absolute is the Ground of all existence. Until then, situated as we are, we can think of Brahman only as *Īśvara*, the Lord of the universe and its Creator (Projector). We know of the Absolute only through the scriptures (*śruti*). Since the universe, *Īśvara*, and Brahman are not our creations, and are independent of us as empirical persons, we cannot eliminate them through our thought or action. We are bound to experience the universe and think of its Creator as a Person as long as we have a personality. It is analogous to the functioning of the senses. Whether we want to or not, we are bound to see what is before our eyes, just as it is presented to us. If we are blind, we cannot see things, even if they be present. Similarly, even if the universe be there, we cannot experience it or know its existence without a personality. Of course, it may and will exist for other persons, for it is a conditional existence. But that has no philosophical significance or value to one who has transcended personality, just as in the case of an unborn person, since the relative and transcendental experiences are the same for and common to all.

Even an emancipated person, when he comes back to his phenomenal personality, sees the universe as other people do. The difference lies in this:

does; it is relatively eternal. Even if some *jīva*s lose their separate identity in Brahman, the magic of the magician does not cease for those who have not understood the truth of the magic. And *Īśvara* being no other than Brahman, He is never devoid of reality; so also the *jīva*, and the *jagat*.[54] It is all *Advaita*, non-duality, the one appearing as the many. A golden ornament may change forms, but the gold continues, and its value as gold always remains, whether it is in the form of an ornament or not.

17. *Īśvara-bhakti-mukti*

So, empirically, Brahman is *Īśvara*, the *Sat-cit-ānanda-vigraha*, and the Possessor and Lord of Maya, *Māyin* or *Māyādhīśa*. He can be thought of as the Creator (*Sṛṣṭikartā*) of the universe, which He projects by the power of His Maya, which now is His *Prakṛti* and acts as the 'material cause'.[55] The whole universe with its beings is under the control of His Maya. The embodied *jīva*s can therefore love and worship *Īśvara* and establish different types of close and intimate relationships (*bhāva*s) with Him, according to aptitude, and gain His grace to overcome the power of His Maya.[56] This relationship of the worshipper and the worshipped can be maintained forever in time if one so desires. *Jīva*s being His own parts

---

other people's seeing is invariably accompanied by the judgement that the seen universe and their personality are real; the enlightened one's seeing is preceded by the memory of the enlightened experience, and by the conviction that they both are unreal like in a dream—that the real Brahman alone is appearing as the universe and its beings.

The universe is not an end in itself, since our sojourn here is temporary. It is a moral gymnasium. It is a means to attain perfection, i.e. to realize our innate Infinitude transcending the world, as in the case of a university in the educational field. Just as no one experiences the universe in the deep-sleep state, similarly, no one experiences it beyond the state of personality, i.e. in *turīya*. Only the pure awareness of Infinite Bliss remains.

54 Cf. *Br. Sū. Bhā.* 2.1.16: "*Yathā ca kāraṇam brahma triṣu kāleṣu sattvam na vyabhicarati, evam kāryam-api jagat triṣu kāleṣu sattvam na vyabhicarati. Ekam ca punaḥ sattvam, ato'pi ananyatvam kāraṇāt kāryasya.*"

55 Cf. *Gītā* 4.6; 7.4–5; 9.7, 8, 10; 14.16–18

56 Cf. *Gītā* 7.14

(*aṁśa*), the Lord has great love towards all of them and towards His creation, the universe, and is easily approachable. He rules it as the *Antaryāmin* (Inner Controller) through His great divine Law (*ṛtam-bṛhat*), which appears as *ṛta* on the plane of cosmic order, as dharma on the plane of social and individual order, and as karma on the plane of action and moral order. It may be noted here that *Īśvara* as a Person can be approached either as He or She, or without any definite form—like light—but with divine attributes. Since *Īśvara* is Infinite and the All, and not an individual, every epithet and approach is limited, but is equally valid in its own way.

The life of the embodied *jīva* in the universe is conditioned by these factors—*ṛta-dharma-karma*—and he goes on reaping the fruits of his karma and gaining experience and knowledge in life after life (*saṁsāra*) in different bodies (*punarjanma*) until he transcends the ego (attachment to the *kārmika* body) by surrendering to *Īśvara*. Then he realizes his inseparable nature from Him, as his integral part, through His grace, while retaining his personal identity through the *sāttvika* body. This is the *sāyujya-mukti*. This path is called the *upāsanā-mārga* or *bhakti-mārga*. It is an easy path since *Īśvara* can be approached as a Person with infinite power and innumerable blessed qualities. (In *bhakti-mārga*, considering *Īśvara* as 'Divine Mother', rather than as an Almighty Being, or King, or Father, is considered more efficacious by many aspirants). A person can also realize his identity with the non-personal Absolute Reality by giving up the *upādhi* of *jīva*-hood through jnana. He can attain this realization through the grace of *Īśvara* Himself, or by direct contemplation of His Absolute aspect, Brahman, as directed in the *śruti*. Shankara considers this realization of the absolute identity of Atman and Brahman final *Mukti* (*Brahma-bhāvaśca mokṣaḥ—Br. Sū. Bhā.* 1.1.4), since only then is all duality transcended and are all limitations *of jīva*-hood or personality at an end; then the Absolute remains in Its pristine glory. (See note 75, p. 89.) He does admit *sāyujya-mukti* etc. on the relative plane. Those who desire to retain their individuality and seek any of the other types of *Mukti*

(*sālokya, sāmīpya, sārūpya, sāyujya* with *Īśvara*), which are called *Mukti* because they free one from *saṁsāra*, though not from *jīva*-hood and *sāttvika* embodiment, are welcome to it.[57]

Commenting on *Chā. Up.* 2.20.2, Shankara says that owing to special attitudes in the worship of deities, the results also accrue differently: "*Etāsām eva agnyādīnām devatānām salokatām, samānalokatām; sārṣṭitām, samāna-ṛddhitvam; sāyujyam, sayugbhāvam eka-deha-dehitvam, ityetat. . . . Bhāvanā viśeṣataḥ phala-viśeṣa upapatteḥ*—[He attains] *salokatām*, the same sphere; *sārṣitām*, equal splendour; *sāyujyam*, close contact, unity in the same body, of these very gods, beginning with fire. . . . The result will vary according to the intensity of meditation."

18. *Karma-mārga*

The Vedas also lay down a path of ritualistic and social activity in harmony with nature (*ṛta-dharma-karma*), which will lead to hap-

---

57 According to the dualistic schools, absolute identity with Brahman is not possible, since they consider the *jīva* as an eternal part of the personal *Īśvara*, the Supreme Being, who for them is the Ultimate Reality; they do not admit a non-dual Impersonal Absolute which appears as *Īśvara*. However, those bhaktas who accept the Non-dual Absolute can attain to It, through the grace of *Īśvara* Himself. The *Bhāgavata* is full of Advaita-bhakti. (See notes 69–70, pp. 86–87.) The saints of Maharashtra, even Tulsidāsa, as also Sri Ramakrishna in the present age, accepted Advaitic Truth and yet practised bhakti to a personal God. They did not find any inconsistency or contradiction in it. Mystics all over the world have had the Advaitic experience, though they have not worked it out as a philosophy or mystic science. It may also be made clear here that the efforts, interest, and essence of the Advaita philosophy do not lie in proving the unreality of the universe, but in establishing the identity of *jīva* as Atman, with Brahman, the Infinite. However, when the identity is realized, the experience of the universe as a distinct entity, being the projection of Maya, automatically ceases for him, just as the dream-universe ceases for a person on waking up. Before he enters this ultimate stage of identity, when personality dissolves and the universe disappears for him, and also as a *jīvanmukta*, he sees that the universe is nothing but Brahman covered by name and form, like gold formed into ornaments. He realizes that he is in all beings and all beings are in himself. (Cf. *Īśa Up.* 6; *Gītā* 6.29.)

piness in this world as well as in various heavenly regions (*svarga*), or to gradual emancipation in course of time (*krama-mukti*), according to merit, by the arising of true knowledge while residing in the heavens. Shankara says, if such activities are performed in a disinterested manner while in this world, dedicating them to *Īśvara*, or with detachment based on Self-knowledge, they will lead to the purification of the mind, i.e. freedom from worldly desires and ego. They result in due course in intense, unselfish devotion to *Īśvara* or to Self-knowledge, or to both according to one's orientation. The former will lead the *jīva*, after the death of the body, to one of the types of *Mukti* mentioned above, and the latter to Self-knowledge, and to immediate freedom (*sadyo-mukti*), here and now while living. This is *karma-mārga*, which is an auxiliary to achieving bhakti and jnana.[58]

19. *Jñāna-mārga*

Since the *jīva* is no other than Brahman in reality, the Upanishads have shown the path of *jñāna-mārga* for directly realizing the identity of the *jīva* as Atman with Brahman, by transcending personality (*jīva*-hood) through renunciation of worldly desires, moral and spiritual disciplines, constant discrimination between the eternal and the temporal, and meditation on the truth of the identity as declared in the *mahāvākyas*. One may take recourse to *karma-mārga* and/or *bhakti-mārga* as helps to achieve this, as *jñāna-mārga* is very difficult. Though the *jīva* is within the jurisdiction of *Īsvara*, *Īśvara*—being Brahman Itself—will not put any obstacle in the path of the *jīva*, if he seeks directly to realize through Knowledge (jnana) that *Īśvara* in His true nature is his own real Self, since this is also in the scheme of the game of the universe. *Īśvara* will even bestow His grace on the *jīva*, if he prays to Him with devotion, to help him overcome

---

58 See *Gītā Bhāṣya* 5.27 (introduction): *"Samyag-darśana-niṣṭhānām sannyāsinām sadyomuktiḥ uktā; karma yogaḥ ca Īśvarārpita-sarvabhāvena krīyamāṇaḥ, sattva-śuddhi, jñānaprāpti, sarva-karma-sannyāsa-krameṇa mokṣāya iti."* See also *Gītā Bhāṣya* 2.48 and 3.19.

the obstacles of the effects of Maya.[59] Rare are the persons who can attain jnana directly by their own efforts—by virtue of accumulated good *samskāra*s over many births. That is why it is described as a very difficult path for embodied beings to tread. But the possibility is there, though few may dare to give up their separate identity to reach the Highest Truth. Therefore, while the validity of the direct path of jnana is recognized, the karma and bhakti paths are advocated as helps or preliminaries to the path of jnana.

20. Significance of '*Jñānāt-eva Mokṣaḥ*'

Why does Shankara, then, say '*Jñānāt-eva mokṣaḥ*' (*Mukti* is through jnana only), if he recognizes the efficacy of karma, bhakti, yoga and other paths? He does recognize their efficacy to lead to their respective dualistic goals envisaged by them. But he holds that final *Mokṣa* is identity with the Infinite Non-dual Absolute, beyond time, space, and causation, where there is no 'other' to limit it (*ekameva advitīyam*), the original state beyond and before the creation of the universe. Shankara holds the Non-dual Absolute Brahman to be the Ultimate Reality as taught by the Upanishads (*Prapañcopaśamaṁ śāntaṁ-śivam-advaitam—Māṇ. Up.* 7), since the whole universe and the *jīva*s emerge from and merge into It, losing all name and form. Brahman is *Īśvara* only when the universe and the *jīva*s are there with separate identity. This implies that the distinctions between *Īśvara*, *jīva*, and *jagat* obtain only within the framework of time, space, and causation. As such, final *Mokṣa* is possible only when the original Non-dual Absolute State is realized (*Brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati—Muṇ. Up.* 3.2.9). *It is not an attainment*, but only the recognition of an ever-existent fact, the knowledge of which was covered up by Maya (*Brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti—Bṛh.Up.* 4.4.6). This is called *sadyo-mukti.*

It is to emphasize this that Shankara says that *Mukti* cannot be attained directly, either by karma or *upāsanā*, but only through

59 *Gītā* 7.14: *"Daivī hi eṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā, māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetām taranti te."* Cf. also *Gītā Bhāṣya* 10.10, 11; 11.54.

jnana, since nothing new is to be attained—only the real nature of the ever-free Self is to be recognized. *Mukti*, in this sense, is not to be granted by anybody or to be created by action; it is the very nature of Atman, one's real Self.[60] Only the ignorance (*ajñāna*) about it in the empirical state is to be removed through *jñāna-niṣṭhā* (constant dwelling on Reality or Truth). For attaining *jñāna-niṣṭhā*, *karma-*, *bhakti-*, and *jñāna-mārgas* are useful to overcome obstacles, severally or in combination, *for ajñāna alone is opposed to jñāna and not karma or upāsanā per se.* Karma and *upāsanā* done with *ajñāna*, that is, with the sense of doership and seeking their fruits, become opposed to jnana; they are not in themselves opposed to it. When done in a spirit of dedication to *Īśvara*, they will lead to *citta-śuddhi* and thence to *jñāna-niṣṭhā* and to jnana: *"Īśvara-prasāda-nimitta jñāna-prāpteḥ."*[61] However, everyone is welcome to his own conception of the Ultimate Reality and the type of *svarga* or *Mokṣa* to be attained. But what is clear is, *Mukti* as envisaged by Shankara, in terms of the Upanishads, is possible only through jnana (i.e. recognition of the identity of Atman and Brahman in Knowledge), by whatever *mārga* or path we may come to this jnana, not necessarily through *jñāna-mārga*, though it is the direct path. We must note here the distinction between jnana and *jñāna-mārga*, the latter being only one of the paths (*mārga*) for attaining jnana.[62] All the other paths when pursued in the proper spirit will also lead to *jñāna-niṣṭhā* and

---

60 Shankara points out that *Mokṣa* is not to be produced, is not to be attained, and is not the result of the purification of Atman or of any modification in It (*na utpādyaḥ, na āpyaḥ, na samskāryaḥ, na vikāryaḥ*). *Mokṣa* is of the very nature of Pure Brahman (*Nitya-śuddha-brahma-svarūpatvāt mokṣasya—Br. Sū. Bhā.* 1.1.4)

61 *Gītā Bhāṣya* 2.39. See also note 73, p. 88.

62 The term *jñāna* may be used in two senses: (1) *Svarūpa-jñāna* (Knowledge of Pure Consciousness which is the Self), and (2) *Vṛtti-jñāna*, which is the cognitive mode of the mind. *Jñāna-mārga* is the path of *vicāra* (discriminative enquiry), and this discipline leads directly to the final realization through *jñāna-niṣṭhā* by generating *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, which, after removing the veil of *ajñāna*, itself ceases, like the fire that, after burning away a piece of wood, itself disappears.

then to jnana. (Cf. *Gītā Bhāṣya* 3.16: "*Prāgātma-jñāna-niṣṭhā yogyatā-prāpteḥ tādarthyena karmayogānuṣṭhānam*"; also 3.4.)

Further, Shankara accepts and provides for other relativistic (dualistic) conceptions of *bhukti*, *bhakti*, and *Mukti* as legitimate in their own spheres, and has found a place for them in his comprehensive system, though he may consider the Absolute as the ultimate nature of Reality. (Cf. *Gītā Bhāṣya* 2.46, 48, 69; 5.5.) Let other Vedantic systems also provide for all types of aspirants in their schemes based on the Upanishads. But the inherent difficulty is, whereas the Advaitic system of Shankara accepts, and can accept, all the dualistic systems, such as *Vaiṣṇava*, *Śaiva*, *Śākta*, etc., and others too from all over the world, as so many relativistic expressions of the same Reality, the dualistic systems not only exclude this Advaitic view, but also exclude each other. (Cf. *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* 3.17, 18; see note 106, p. 124).

There is also a philosophical angle to the statement that *Mukti* is possible only through jnana: If *Mukti* be the result of either karma or *upāsanā*, directly, and is an achievement of an extraneous nature based on one's personality, and not the realization of one's own real nature, then *Mukti* becomes adventitious and therefore limited and can be also lost. Again, limited karma and *upāsanā* cannot confer as their result everlasting *Mukti*, but they can lead to *jñāna-niṣṭhā*. However, this is only a technical, philosophical point; for the highest type of *karma-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga* practically lead us to the door of jnana or end in jnana, if done in a disinterested way dedicated to *Īśvara* (*Sarvam karmākhilam partha jñāne parisamāpyate—Gītā* 4.33; see also *Gītā Bhāṣya* 4.36). As such, the realization of *Mukti* as one's essential nature, i.e. realizing one's Self as one with infinite Brahman in jnana, alone is held as true *Mukti*. This identity is pre-existent, and is only to be recognized. It cannot be created either by karma or bhakti; nor is it created even by jnana—jnana only reveals it. This does not preclude anyone seeking any goal or any other type of *Mukti* he desires. The ultimate scriptural position is philosophically made clear; and each one is free to choose, accord-

ing to his fitness (*adhikāra*), i.e. according to his aptitude (*arthitva*) and capacity (*sāmarthya*), any other goals provided by the scriptures—*svarga*, or the various divine *loka*s, or Vaikuṇṭha, Kailāsa, Goloka, etc. There is no question of high or low in this, for it is the One Reality that is manifesting as everything; it is all Advaita. It is a question of taste (*ruci*) and aptitude on the relative plane. It is all part of the universe-game.

21. *Jīvanmukta*: Liberated-while-living

An embodied person, freed through jnana, realizes, even while living, that the whole universe and its beings are manifestations of Brahman; and the activities of the psycho-physical organism, with which his *jīva* was associated before the rise of jnana, now reflect this liberated state, the *jīva* remaining identified with the Witness-Atman, instead of the body. He is not affected by the universe, and his body functions like an actor in a drama. This is called *jīvanmukti—liberation-while-living.* A bhakta also may be a *jīvanmukta* by surrendering his ego to the Lord. He sees the Lord everywhere and considers himself as His servant or instrument. (Cf. *Gītā* 6.30; 11.55; 12.2, 13–19.) A person following *Karma-yoga* too may be a *jīvanmukta*, while remaining outwardly apparently active, realizing that the activities are going on through natural forces—just as involuntary activities within the body go on by themselves—or due to the will of God, and he is the Self, free from all activity and agency. (Cf. *Gītā* 5.7–20.)

22. The Aim of Philosophy—Discovery of Truth

It should be clearly remembered that Shankara is not giving his own philosophy based on mere reason, but is rationally presenting in a system the realizational statements of the Upanishads. He is expounding the Vedanta at its highest and best, and is doing so most comprehensively. There should be no personal preferences in expounding scriptural statements. The aim must be the discovery of Truth and its presentation without fear or favour. One has to put

oneself in line with the scriptures and harmonize them rationally, and not deliberately dilute or distort them to suit one's predilections or conveniences. We should raise ourselves up to Truth, and not try to make the Truth suit us. Those who do the latter are neither spiritual scientists nor philosophers. *Śruti*, *yukti*, and *svānubhūti*—in the light of these a harmonious system should be evolved. It is one thing to acknowledge or recognize one's inability to seek the highest goal taught in the scriptures and to seek an easier goal, or to follow one that appeals to the mind and is to one's taste, or to seek to attain it stage by stage, but it is quite another to distort the teachings to make them popular or convenient. Those who do this are termed by Shankara as not fit to be in the company of Truth-seekers (*paṇḍita-apasada*).[63]

23. Disciplines for the Seeker of the Highest Truth

The pursuit of the Highest Truth or Reality, which must be the objective of a philosopher or spiritual scientist, requires the highest training and discipline. Shankara codified these in his famous *Sādhana-catuṣṭaya*. (See *Br. Sū. Bhā.* 1.1.1; *Vivek.* 16–27). It requires of the aspirant:

---

63 For Shankara, in tune with the Upanishads and the *Gītā*, non-personal Brahman and personal *Īśvara* are not two different entities, but one and the same Reality. He accepts the relevant statements of personal *Īśvara* as equally applying to Brahman, i.e. as if made by non-personal Brahman through personal *Īśvara*; the case is similar to that of Brahman-Atman, which are one. It is only from this standpoint that most of the statements in scriptures like the *Gītā*, and *Bhāgavatam* become understandable and reconcilable. What Shankara objects to is the negation of non-personal Brahman and Its presence in all as the pure Atman, and assertions that *Īśvara* is the sole Supreme Person, *jīva* being his part, or dependent, and that duality in all states is eternal and final. About those who advance such arguments, contrary to the statements of the *śruti*, Shankara says: *"Yaḥ ca evam budhyate yaḥ ca bodhayati na asau (ātmā) kṣetrajña iti. Evam manvāno yaḥ sa paṇḍita-apasadaḥ saṁsāra mokṣayoḥ śāstrasya ca arthavatvam karomi iti; Ātmahā svayam mūḍhaḥ anyān ca vyāmohayati, śāstrārtha saṁpradāya rahitatvāt śruta-hānim aśruta-kalpanām ca kurvan. Tasmāt asampradāyavit sarva-śāstravid api mūrkhavad eva upekṣaṇīyaḥ."* (*Gītā Bhāṣya* 13.2.14)

1. An intense passion for the highest Truth and for Spiritual Freedom;
2. Moral and spiritual disciplines of the highest order in good measure to enable him not to swerve from Truth;
3. A keen discrimination between the Eternal and the ephemeral;
4. Renunciation of the ephemeral and all desire for extraneous enjoyment here on earth and hereafter in heaven, coupled with readiness to face joyfully all trials and tribulations.[64]

Further, he should possess complete objectivity, free from personal attachments and aversions. Those who have attachments to personalities, either of oneself, or of some great one, or even of a cosmic being, and not to Principles and Reality or Truth, cannot be fit candidates for realizing the Infinite Truth.[65] The highest realization is also laid down in the Upanishads, in the *mahāvākya*s, as the realization of the identity of Atman and Brahman (*Ayamātmā Brahma*; *Tattvamasi*; *Aham Brahmāsmi*).[66] Shankara points out that the mind

---

64 See:
- *Adhyātma-yogādhigamena devam matvā dhīraḥ.* (*Kaṭha Up.* 1.2.12)
- *Dṛśyate tu agryayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣma darśibhiḥ.* (Ibid., 1.3.12)
- *Satyena labhyaḥ tapasā hi eṣa ātmā samyak jñānena brahmacaryeṇa nityam. . . . Satyam eva jayate na anṛtam.* (*Muṇ. Up.* 3.1.5, 6)
- *Śanto-dāntaḥ uparataḥ titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvā ātmanyeva ātmānam paśyati, sarvam ātmānam paśyati.* (*Bṛh. Up.* 4.4.23)

65 Shankara, commenting on *Gītā* 7.27, remarks: "*Na hi icchā-dveṣa-doṣa-paravaśīkṛta-cittasya yathābhūtārtha-vijñānam utpadyate bahiḥ api; kimu-vaktavyam tābhyām āviṣṭa-buddheḥ sammudhasya pratyagātmani bahu-pratibandhe jñānam na utpadyate iti.*" See also *Vivek.* 271: "*Lokavāsanayā jantoḥ śāstra-vāsanayā api ca, deha-vāsanayā jñānam yathāvat naiva jāyate*"; *Astāvakra Saṁhitā* 16.11: "*Hariḥ yadi upadeṣṭā te haraḥ kamalajo'pi vā, tathāpi na tava svāsthyam sarvavismaraṇād-ṛte.*"

It may be noted that Sri Ramakrishna had to go beyond the vision of the Divine Mother to realize the Advaitic Truth in *nirvikalpa* samadhi.

66 Cf. *Kaṭha Up.* 2.1.15: "*Yathodakam śuddhe śuddham āsiktam tādṛgeva bhavati, evam muner vijānata ātmā bhavati gautama*"; also *Muṇ. Up.* 3.2.8: "*Yathā nadyaḥ syandamānāḥ samudre astam gacchanti nāma-rūpe vihāya, tathā vidvān nāmarūpād vimuktaḥ parātparam puruṣam upaiti divyam.*"

that has been well refined by following the instructions of the *śāstras* and the acharya, and well disciplined by self-control, serenity, and other virtues, is the instrument for the realization of the Atman.[67]

24. Graduated Paths to the Highest Truth

But neither the Vedic seers and sages nor Shankara were oblivious of the need for easy graduated paths. Since Brahman, empirically, is the personal *Sat-cit-ānanda Īśvara*, He can be approached either through *karma-*, *jñāna-*, or *bhakti-mārgas* or paths, corresponding to His three aspects of *Sat*, *Cit*, and *Ānanda* respectively.[68] Only for the Advaitic realization of identity of Atman and Brahman in jnana, one has to go beyond all personality and *jīva*-hood. The transcendental (*para* or *nirguṇa*) and the personal (*apara* or *saguṇa*), both are aspects of the same Brahman or Reality; and there is no higher or lower in them. One aspect is transcendent and the other relative, and as such, immanent. As the *Bhāgavata* says, the same Supreme Reality of the nature of non-dual jnana is worded differently by knowers of Truth as Brahman, *Paramātman*, and Bhagavan.[69] It is a question of choice. For after realizing one of the two aspects, one can easily go to the other if desired. (Cf. *Gītā* 5.4: *Ekamapi āsthitaḥ samyak ubhayorvindate phalam.*)

---

67 "*Śāstra-ācārya-upadeśa-śama-damādi saṁskṛtam manaḥ ātma-darśane karaṇam.*" (*Gītā Bhāṣya* 2.21.5)

68 Of course, *Sat-cit-ānanda* are not in fact three distinct features. They are inseparable like the three angles of a triangle. *Sat* is *Cit* and *Sat-cit* is *Ānanda*. They are mentioned separately because we experience them separately, and also because the universe, an effect of Maya, has three aspects which are negated in Brahman, viz. impermanence, insentience, and imperfection. We talk of the heat and light of the fire, though they are integral to it, since we can experience them separately.

Similarly, *karma-*, *jñāna-*, and *bhakti-mārgas* are also inseparable. They are mentioned separately only from the point of view of predominance of expression and approach. (Cf. note 18, p. 50, and note 103, p. 121). These may also be related respectively to the *kriyā-jñāna-icchhā śaktīs* (connative-cognitive-affective powers) of *Īśvara* and *jīva*.

69 "*Vadanti tat tattvavidaḥ tattvaṁ yat jñānam advayam; Brahma-iti, paramātmā-iti, Bhagavān iti śabdyate.*" (*Bhāgavata* 1.2.11)

Sri Ramakrishna calls Brahman and *Īśvara*, the *nitya* and *līlā* aspects of the same Reality, and he was at home in both. In fact, many sages have remained on the stage of the personal God even after Self-realization, before merging their personality.[70] Shankara was one such, and Sri Ramakrishna in our times is another. Shankara knew by his Advaitic realizations that all that is, is the same *akhaṇḍa-advitīya-Brahman*, which assumes for us different names and forms through the power of Maya. He did not find that any spiritual path, sincerely followed, proves unsuitable or militates against Advaita, provided it is properly oriented.[71] They all lead to the realization of the different aspects of Brahman and gradually to the Highest Reality.[72] That is why he could give support to the six religious systems then current in India, and earn the epithet *Ṣaṇmata-sthāpanācārya.* He introduced the *upāsanā* of *pañcadevatās* or *pañcāyatana* worship, composed hymns to the various deities, and upheld and gave impetus to dharma, karma, yoga, and bhakti in their respective spheres.

25. Attitude Towards Karma and Bhakti

It is a mistake to think that Sri Shankara was opposed to karma or *Karma-kāṇḍa*. He recognized their importance and their great value in their own sphere of worldly and heavenly attainments. He supported the *Gītā* teaching that those who were on that plane

---

70 *"Ātmārāmāḥ ca munayaḥ nirgranthāḥ api urukrame, kurvanti ahaitukīm-bhaktim ittham-bhūtaguṇo Hariḥ."* (*Bhāgavata* 1.7.10)

71 Cf. commentary on *Māṇḍukya Kārikā* 4.43: *"Ye ca evam upalambhāt samācārāt ca ajātivastunaḥ trasantaḥ asti-vastu iti advayāt ātmano viruddham dvaitam pratipadyante, teṣām ajāteḥ trasatām śraddadhānānām sanmārgāvalambīnām jāti-upalambha kṛtā doṣāḥ na siddhim upayāsyanti; viveka mārga-pravṛttatvāt. Yadyapi kaścid doṣaḥ syāt so api alpa eva bhaviśyati samyak darśana apratipattihetukaḥ ityarthaḥ."*

72 Cf. *Gītā* 7.21: *"Yo yo yām yām tanum bhaktaḥ śraddhayā arcitum icchati; tasya tasya-acalām śraddhām tāmeva vidadhāmyaham"*; and 4.11: *"Ye yathā mām prapadyante tān tathaiva bhajāmyaham; mama vartma anuvartante manuśyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ."*

should not give up work out of delusion.[73] What he was opposed to was the claim by the ritualists, and that too on the philosophical level, that the desire-laden, heaven-oriented karma, based on the idea of one's personality and agentship and the desire to enjoy the fruits of one's actions, can be combined in sadhana simultaneously by the same person with the pursuit of Self-knowledge, which is characterised by renunciation of agentship, fruits of actions, and personality.[74] We reach the real Self not by the accumulation of external things, but by renunciation—renunciation of the *pañca-koṣas* (five sheaths) of the personality. Moreover, to Shankara, jnana or knowledge of Brahman does not signify knowing Brahman as an object of knowledge. It denotes being Brahman Itself. It does not consist in knowing It as the 'other', but by knowing It through identity in realization, *the knowing that is being.* (*Anubhava avasānatvāt brahma-jñānasya—Br. Sū.* 1.1.4; *Brahmaiva san brahma āpyeti—Bṛh.Up.* 4.4.6.)

Shankara recognised the great spiritual value of *niṣkāma-karma*, or work without selfish desire, for the welfare of society (*lokasaṁgraha*) and that which is dedicated to *Īśvara* (*Īśvara arpita*) in the spirit of yoga. He never said anything against that bhakti which seeks to surrender one's ego to the Lord, and wants to be His instrument. He was in favour of it. Only he said that as long as bhakti remains on the level of duality, one will not reach true

---

73 Cf. *Gītā Bhāṣya* 2.46, 3.16. In the introduction to his *Gītā Bhāṣya*, Shankara says: *"Abhyudayārthaḥ api yaḥ pravṛtti lakṣaṇo dharmo varṇāśramān ca uddiśya vihītaḥ sa devādi-prāptihetuḥ api san Īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhyā anuṣṭhīyamānaḥ sattva śuddhaye bhavati phala-abhisandhi-varjitaḥ. Śuddha-sattvasya ca jñāna-niṣṭhā-yogyatā-prāpti-dvāreṇa jñānotpatti-hetutvena ca niḥśreyasa-hetutvam-api pratipadyate."* (See also note 77, p. 89.)

Commenting on *Gītā* 2.46, he says: *"Tasmāt prāk-jñānaniṣṭhā-adhikāra-prāpteḥ, karmaṇi adhikṛtena kūpa-taḍāgādi artha-sthānīyam api karma kartavyam."*

74 Cf. *Gītā Bhāṣya* 2.11 (intro): *"Jñāna-karmaṇoḥ kartṛttva-akartṛttva, ekatva-anekatva, buddhyāśrayayoḥ eka-puruṣa-āśrayatva asambhavaḥ"*; 4.11: *"Na hi ekasya mumukṣutvam phalārthitvam ca yugapat sambhavati."*

Mokṣa, i.e. identity of *jīva* as Atman, with Brahman.[75] He recognized that bhakti matures into jnana in *parābhakti*, when one loses one's identity in the Lord (*jñānī tvātmaiva me matam*). In this connection Shankara's *Sādhana-pañcaka* verses are very illuminating in showing his all-inclusive, comprehensive approach.[76]

26. The Great Twofold Achievement of Sri Shankara

Thus Shankara recognized the value of different types and grades of sadhana in leading the whole society gradually to the highest goal, and found appropriate places for them in his scheme. He strove to cleanse society of undesirable accretions and to re-orient the *varṇa-āśrama dharma* to help all to achieve welfare and upliftment in secular life (*abhyudaya*), and to attain the *Summum Bonum*, the Supreme Goal of life (*niḥśreyasa*), that is, Spiritual Liberation or *Mokṣa*. Therefore, in understanding Shankara's philosophy one should never forget how he worked it out in life and how he strove to reinstate the *Vaidika dharma* of twofold objective.[77] It will not do simply to brush away his profound thought with the hasty judgement and a sneer: "Oh, he dismisses the world as unreal." It simply betrays ignorance. Philosophical concepts should not be

---

75 This is well illustrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, who had to transcend the personal form of the Divine Mother before he could realize the Advaitic experience in *nirvikalpa* samadhi. Everyone knows that Sri Ramakrishna was a supreme bhakta. The Divine Mother Herself helped him to reach the Advaitic state.

76 *Vedo nityamadhīyatām, taduditam karma svanuṣṭhīyatām; teneśasya vidhīyatām apacitiḥ kāmye matiḥ tyajyatām. Pāpaughaḥ paridhūyatām, bhavasukhe doṣonusandhīyatām; ātmechhā-vyavasīyatām, nijagṛhāt tūrṇam vinirgamyatām. Sangaḥ satsu vidhīyatām, bhagavato-bhaktiḥ dṛdhā dhīyatām, śānti ādiḥ paricīyatām, dṛḍhataram karmāśu saṁtyajyatām. Sadvidvānupasarpyatām pratidinam tatpāduke sevyatām, Brahma-ekākṣaram arthyatām śrutiśirovākyam samākarṇyatām. . . .*

77 Shankara points out in the introduction to his *Gītā Bhāṣya*: "*Dvividho hi vedokto dharmaḥ, pravṛtti lakṣaṇo nivṛtti lakṣaṇaśca; jagataḥ sthitikāraṇam; prāṇinām sākṣāt abhyudaya niḥśreyasa hetuḥ yaḥ sa dharmo brāhmaṇādyaiḥ varṇibhiḥ āśramibhiḥ ca anuṣṭhīyamānaḥ.*"

reduced to ignorant talks of everyday life.[78] (See also *The Status of the Universe*, pp. 96–107.)

27. The Concept of *Mithyā*

The misunderstanding of the concept of *mithyā* is the cause of much confusion. It is not a concept from the empirical standpoint. It is a relativistic statement. *Mithyā* is not 'unreal' in the sense of empirical unreality, or non-existence. It is not unreal to me and you. It is as 'real' or as 'unreal' *pari pasu* with the conception of the status of our own personality. We should not confuse a philosophical statement of the principle of metaphysical *un-reality* with the actual empirical unreality and treat the two concepts on a par. Empirically, the universe is as real to Shankara as to any confirmed realist. Even metaphysically, when our notions of *Īśvara-jīva-jagat* are said to be sublated transcendentally in realization, they remain in their real nature as Brahman from whence they arose, and which they always were; only name and form cease (*nāma-rūpe vihāya*), not their substance (*vastu*) which is Brahman.[79] They are not the creation of any

---

78 In *Manīṣā-pañcaka* Shankara clearly says: *"Jagat ca sakalam cinmātra vistāritam."* He has again and again reiterated the Upanishadic statement *"Brahmaiva idaṁ viśvam"*—this world is nothing but Brahman; it is the manifestation of Supreme Consciousness (*Cit*). It is characterised by ever-changing names and forms (*pratikṣaṇam-anyathā-svabhāvam*), but in and through it shines Brahman, its substantive Reality. But we take the world by itself as something having its own independent existential reality, due to natural *avidyā*. It is this world *of our notions* that is *mithyā* (un-real or relatively real). But as Brahman, it is absolutely real (*satya*). We have to transcend our notional world and realize it as Brahman. So he gives the sadhana of *nitya-anitya vastu viveka*, the discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral. The *Īśa Upaniṣad* also asks us to cover everything in this changeful world with the Lord: *"Īśāvāsyamidaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiñca jagatyām jagat."* (1)

79 The translation 'unreal' for '*mithyā*' as a philosophical concept is not appropriate and is often misunderstood. We may therefore put it as 'un-real', that is, 'non-real'. Empirically, we may say, *mithyā* is that which is neither absolutely real (*Sat*) like Brahman, nor absolutely unreal (*asat*) like the horns of a hare. It is a mixture of *sat-asat* (neither absolutely real nor un-

of us empirically, nor have we created ourselves. They are given facts, and they cannot be eliminated by anyone. One can only transcend them by transcending one's own personality according to the disciplines taught by the *śruti*. What *mithyā* really means, therefore, is this: you do not know the real nature of either *Īśvara*, *jīva*, or *jagat*, or even of your own personality—how it arose and how it functions. You and others have different changing and limited notions of them. When you realize the Truth of Existence, and your own real nature, you will know they were nothing but Brahman all the while; there was nothing other than Brahman—it was *A-dvaita*.

Commenting on *Br. Sū.* 1.1.2, Shankara distinguishes between *tattva-jñāna* and *mithyā-jñāna*, which throws light on the concept *of mithyā*: "An entity cannot be judged diversely to be of such a kind, and not to be of such a kind, to be existent and non-existent (simultaneously). Options depend on human notions, whereas the valid knowledge of the true nature of a thing is not dependent

---

real); it is *mithuna*. (*"Satya-anrte mithunī krtya,"* says Shankara in his introduction to the *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*). It has conditional or functional reality like waves in the ocean. The Brahman aspect is Real and the name and form (*nāma-rūpa*) aspect unreal, because they cannot exist by themselves apart from Brahman, their Ground-substance, just as the waves cannot exist apart from the ocean.

The *Dṛg-dṛṣya-viveka* (20) says: *"Asti-bhāti-priyaṁ-rūpaṁ-nāma ceti aṁśa pañcakam, ādya-trayaṁ brahma-rūpaṁ jagat-rūpaṁ tato dvayam."* (See note 42, p. 67, for another explanation of *mithyā*).

The universe, along with our personality, is a process in time, ever-changing; the past conditions the present, and the present conditions the future. That which is past can never be recovered, and the future is only an expectation. And further, our ideas of the universe and ourselves differ from person to person and also change with our different notions at different periods and in different stages of our life. In fact what we call the universe is in itself a vague indefinite set of limited experiences of vast and varied objective phenomena.

We may also note here that no real existent entity can ever be sublated, *but only our conditional notions about it are sublated* when the truth is discovered. The *Gītā* (2.16) says: *"Nāsato vidyate bhāvo, na-abhāvo vidyate sataḥ."* We may demolish a building which is considered 'real' and of practical use, because it is artificial; but we cannot remove the burning

on human notions. On what does it depend then? It is dependent on the thing itself. For a notion (formed in semi-darkness) such as, 'Is this a stump, or a man, or something else', with regard to the same stump, cannot be *true knowledge* (*tattva-jñāna*). Here the notion, 'This is a man or something else' is *wrong knowledge* (*mithyā-jñāna*), but (when he brings a light and determines), 'This is verily a stump,' it is true knowledge, for it is dependent on the thing itself (and not on notions). Thus the validity of the knowledge of an existing entity is determined by the thing itself. This being so, the knowledge of Brahman also must be determined by the thing itself (and not by our notions), since such knowledge is concerned with an existing Reality."

28. Grades of Empirical Realities and Unrealities

Let us now consider some grades of appearances and realities that we experience in life:

1. The supposed water seen in the mirage is an empirical appearance and empirically unreal for it does not serve the purpose of water. However, it is an experience of which we make literary use.
2. A reflected image—say, of a face in the mirror—is unreal, for it does not really exist inside the mirror, but in our brain, though we seem to see it out there; still it serves the purpose of show-

---

nature of fire. The scientists may disintegrate matter and at some time in the future may hope to disintegrate even energy, but they cannot disintegrate the ultimate constituent of existence, i.e. what is Ultimate Existence itself, which is All-pervading and hence is their very Self also. (Cf. *Gītā* 2.17: *Avināśi tu tad viddhi yena sarvam-idam tatam; vināśam avyayasya-asya na kaścid kartum arhati.*) Conditioned states may come and go, but not that which is the basis of those states. Commenting on the above *Gītā* verse, Shankara declares that the Self cannot be destroyed *even by Īśvara*. It always abides in the midst of all the changes (*Vinaśyatsu avinaśyantam yah paśyati sa paśyati—Gītā* 13.27). So Shankara exhorts us: instead of disintegrating matter or energy piecemeal, disintegrate in thought the universe and the personality itself, which are conditional existences, and you will reach your infinite immortal Self.

ing our face to us, and helps us perform our morning bathroom rituals. Again, a shadow, though not a positive entity, can serve several useful purposes, and give us some knowledge. As an experience it is real, but as a substance it is unreal.

3. The events we see happening on the cinema screen are unreal, for really no persons and things exist on the screen. It is the deceptive play of light passing through small still pictures on the moving film, enlarged with the help of a lens. The show evokes our emotions and feelings. As a show it is real, though the contents are unreal; it is conceived and contrived like that, and has entertainment and educative value.
4. An image of a deity shaped artificially, from clay for instance, is unreal in the sense that it is nothing but clay, shaped according to one's notions. The idea of the deity is superimposed on it. We even immerse the image in water after the worship, and the clay image disintegrates. But on that account we do not lack devotion or fervour when we worship the deity through the image, for though the image is artificial and later is discarded, the deity whom we have invoked and whom we worship in and through it is considered infinite and eternal and does not disappear with the image.

Similarly, we may worship and love the Infinite and Eternal Brahman through Its image (*pratimā*), the personal *Īśvara*,[80] and there need be no lack of fervour or devotion, because even if the notion of *Īśvara* is sublated (along with the notion of the universe) when we transcend our personality, Brahman, who was worshipped through Him, always exists. That is why we also

---

80 Cf. *Gītā* 14.27: *"Brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham amṛtasya-avyayasya ca, śaśvatasya ca dharmasya sukhasya-ekāntikasya ca."*

Śrīdhara Svāmī, the great bhakta, comments: *"Brahmaṇo'ham pratiṣṭhā, pratimā* (image); *ghanībhūtam brahmaiva aham, yathā ghanībhūtaḥ prakāśa eva sūryamaṇḍalam tadvad eva ityarthaḥ."*

Commenting on the verse, Shankara says: *"Yayā ca Īśvara-śaktyā bhaktānugrahādi prayojanāya brahmapratiṣṭhate: pravartate; sā śaktiḥ brahma-eva aham, śakti-śaktimatoḥ ananyatvāt."*

continue to worship and love the incarnations of *Īśvara*, though their earthly forms have disappeared. Further, the notions of *Īśvara* and the universe are not sublated for all, but only for the Self-realized person, *when he has transcended his jīva*-hood, just as when a person is in deep sleep, he does not experience the universe or his own personality, while others do so. But the experience of the absence of the universe in the deep-sleep state is universal and common to all persons. Hence our empirical universe is relative to the waking state only. And Shankara never denies that the universe is a matter of experience with its own laws of cause and effect for all those who are on the empirical level. It is also not compulsory that one should give up *jīva*-hood. If one likes the *Īśvara* aspect of Reality, he can continue to love and worship Him as a *jīva*.

5. A currency note is only an authorised symbol of the monetary value denoted on it, and derives its value from the gold in deposit to support it. Inherently, it has mere paper value; still, as long as it is not demonetized, it serves the purposes of real gold for all our transactions, and we look upon it as such and keep it safely. Similarly, though *Īśvara* is phenomenal, since Brahman is the Reality behind Him, He can act as God as long as the universe and the *jīva*s exist, and we can really love and worship Him, as He is none other than Brahman personified.
6. In a drama, though the actors are 'real', they impersonate characters who do not exist. The impersonated characters are 'un-real' since they are not really there; but they are not unreal also since they are represented by the 'real' actors, *whose identity, however, is not affected by the assumed roles.* We enjoy the assumed roles. Similarly, Brahman, with its power of Maya, projects this universe and assumes the role of *Īśvara* and living beings to play the game of the universe, just as in the dream, the dreamer's mind itself assumes the roles of the universe, the dream-ego—that is, the subject—and all the objects and beings within the dream. As long as the *jīva*s exist, the universe and *Īśvara* also exist. If a

particular *jīva* gets out of the game by giving up its *jīva*-hood, the game will continue for other innumerable *jīva*s as long as they want. In time, the game is ever there, because time is one of the aspects of Maya.

7. In light sleep, the mind projects a dream world; *we do not deliberately do it*. We, with our dream-personality, live and move and have relations with others in it, forgetting our real empirical universe and the waking-state personality, which all the while is lying on the bed. But on waking, we find all that we witnessed in the dream has disappeared and was unreal, *though it then appeared to be real.* However, the dream experience (not the contents) and the experiencer of the dream who remembers it are empirically real. In deep sleep (*suṣupti*), there is neither the dream, nor the dreamer, nor the dream world. Only we remain purely as experiencers of the absence of everything, including our personality and ego.

So the different and differing experiences of waking, dream, and deep sleep come and go, but the experiencer abides in all the states. Under these circumstances and facts of experience, how can we say that the waking personality and experiences alone are 'real', though they were sublated in other states, and even empirically, their contents and our notions regarding them too are ever-changing? Just as the dream-state entities have a dream-state reality, the waking-state entities have a waking-state reality. Of course, we can say they are of a different category than those of the dream. They do have a conditional reality and value applicable to the waking-state personality. But that personality too is ever-changing, from birth till death, with different ideas and notions of the universe at different periods of life, and the universe and its events themselves are in a constant state of flux, even as the personality is in a state of flux. *But, what is the relationship of this 'real' world to a person unborn, to a person in deep sleep or coma, and to the dead? And what is its value to them?* Our life on this earth individually is miserably short, a mere point in eternity; the same is the case with all those who will come in the

future. Has the ever-changing world an independent value of its own or has it only a relational or relative value?

29. The Status of the Universe

There are various view, or *vādas*, held by philosophers regarding the status of the universe. We shall consider some of them here.

Sri Ramakrishna, in his teachings, often says, "God alone is real; all else is unreal." Swami Vivekananda, in *Jnana Yoga*, as well as in 'The Free Soul' and a few other lectures, also presents the ultimate Advaitic view of *Ajāta-vāda* (non-origination of the universe), without using the term and without showing any exclusive preference.[81] In one poem, he says, "This world's a dream, though true it seem." Neither Sri Ramakrishna nor Swami Vivekananda advocated any view exclusively.

A noted scholar, the author of the *Vedānta-saṁjñā-mālikā*,[82] writes: *Sṛṣti-dṛṣti-vāda* is the philosophic view that the universe has independent existence, and hence is perceived. *Dṛṣti-sṛṣti-vāda* is the philosophic view that the universe exists because it is perceived. *Ajāta-vāda* is the philosophic view that the universe has neither existence, nor is it perceived (by a perfected one, who realizes that Brahman alone *is*).

a. *Ajāta-vāda*

Since all philosophizing is possible and necessary only in the realm of duality, when we are experiencing the universe and our own individuality as well as that of other beings, *ajāta-vāda*, in the sense of not accepting any *vyāvahārika* (functional) or *prātibhāsika* (apparent) *sattā* (validity) of the universe, cannot be rationally maintained, for then there is no place for philosophizing at all. The author of the aforesaid book says that *ajāta-vāda* accepts *pratibhāsa*

---

81 See *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Vol. 2; 'The Atman', 'The Real and the Apparent Man'; see also the poem 'The Song of the Sannyasin'.

82 Swami Dhireshananda, *Vedānta-saṁjñā-mālikā* (Bengali) (Kolkata: Udbodhan Office, BS 1373) p. 46

(appearance), but not *prātibhāsika sattā* (apparent validity), which does not seem to connote any real difference, for in any case, the appearance of the universe as a whole, including the perceiver's individuality, disappears only in the state of realization of Brahman. After all, in Advaita, everything that exists, or Absolute Existence (*Sat*), is the Infinite Brahman alone, and the appearances derive their *sattā* (validity) from Brahman in all the states, whether *vyāvahārika* or *prātibhāsika*. The validity spoken of is regarding the experience of the appearance, and not of the appearance itself. Hence, the contention—that if *prātibhāsika sattā* is accepted, appearance cannot be removed—does not hold water, for when Brahman alone exists, what is there to be removed and by whom? Moreover, the same contention can be adduced in the case of *vyāvahārika sattā* as well. And as long as the appearance of the individual's personality is present, the appearance of the universe as well as the mutual relative validity of both will continue, for both are integral parts of one total appearance, just as the scenes and events appearing on the screen in a cinema have the same mutual validity.

Ajāta (unborn or un-originated) does not mean that the apparent universe is not experienced or is not amenable to activity on the relative plane, but that *it is not really born or originated*, that it is an insubstantial appearance deriving its validity from the Substance (*vastu*), the ground on which it appears. It is not an active creation or manifestation by the Absolute Infinite Reality—Brahman—which is changeless. We may exemplify the universe-appearance like this: When we say 'light shines', it is not to say that light is doing any activity, but it is its very nature to shine.[83] And the shining appears *to us* in the dualistic state. The universe appears spontaneously due to Brahman's imponderable power called Maya, giving rise phenomenally to the appearance, on the substratum of Brahman, of the triad *jīva-jagat-Īśvara* (soul-universe-God), which have mutual

---

83 Cf. *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* 1.9: *"Devasya eṣa svabhāvaḥ ayam; āpta-kāmasya kā spṛhā?*—The appearance of the universe is due to the very nature of the Effulgent Being; for, what desire can the ever-fulfilled Infinite One have?"

relative validity in themselves, as they have the same phenomenal or empirical status. They all derive their validity from the Absolute Reality, Brahman, their common substratum. So the statement of *ajāta* is applicable to *Brahman's changeless nature*, to the fact of non-origination of the universe from it, since no cause acts on Brahman, internal or external (cf. *sabāhya-abhyantaro hi ajaḥ—Muṇ. Up.* 2.1.2), and not to the universe-appearance.[84] Otherwise, there would be no necessity to assert, and there would be none to assert, that it is not born. The validity of the universe refers to its *phenomenal validity* to us in the dualistic state.

Maya and māyic appearance or projection is accepted even in the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, where the *ajāta-vāda* is specially put forth.[85] In *ajāta-vāda* there is an attempt to prove that the universe is unreal like a dream and did not really originate, and not that it does not appear in the dualistic state. When one becomes aware of oneself as Brahman in perfect realization (*pūrṇa jñāna*), one's separate limited individuality disappears; along with it the appearance of the universe also ceases, as there is only the non-dual infinite Brahman—just as the dream world disappears on waking up, and is realized to have no substantial existence. But as long as one is aware of oneself as an individual, *the appearance of the rest of the universe with its beings and its functional validity will not cease, for the individual himself is an aspect or part of the total universe.* Even

---

84 Advaita Vedanta is not primarily interested in the status of the universe, but in the nature of Reality—Brahman/Atman. In the course of rationally establishing the absoluteness and non-duality of Brahman/Atman, which is a fact of spiritual experience, it discusses the nature of the universe-appearance. As Shankara has pointed out: "By knowing the stories of creation of the universe, etc. [for none can really know the history of creation], nothing is gained spiritually; but by realizing the Oneness, that is, the Absolute nature of Atman, which is the Self of all, one attains Immortality (*amṛtattvam*), that is Perfection and Spiritual Freedom (*Mukti*)." (Commentary on the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, introduction to Chapter 2: *Na hi sṛṣṭi ākhyāyikādi parijñānāt kiṁcit phalam iṣyate; aikātmya-svarūpa parijñānāt tu amṛtattvam phalam.*)

85 See Māṇḍūkya Kārikā 1.16–17; 2.12–19; 3.10, 18–19, 27

if the empirical world seems to disappear during dream and deep sleep, since true knowledge of Reality and the true nature of the Self has not arisen, it comes back along with the individuality on waking, with the same power of delusion.[86] This dichotomy of the one integral undivided Existence into individual perceiver and the perceived universe is itself due to Maya.

The gradation of *adhikāris* (candidates) into *uttama* (superior), *madhyama* (mediocre), and *adhama* (inferior) in this context, referring to the *ajāta*, *dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi*, and *sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi vādas* can be based on only spiritual competence.[87]

b. Sri Shankara's system of *Vivarta-vāda*

Though Shankara is said to have commented on the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, where *ajāta-vāda* is advocated, in none of his other works does he seem to mention it. *Ajāta-vāda* is only from the Ultimate Reality (*pāramārthika*) point of view of Advaita. But Shankara's is a comprehensive system which accounts for empirical experiences as well. He is interested in the Highest Truth not only as the Supreme Goal of life, but also in Its different levels of manifestation on the phenomenal plane, and in applying the understanding of this towards the solution of religious, ethical, and social problems and the regeneration of humanity. Philosophically, he maintains *vivarta-vāda* (superimposed apparent transformation of the Changeless Reality) from the empirical point of view, for *ajāta* is only from the *śruti* or *realizational* standpoint; it cannot be an empirical *vāda*. That is, though *ajāti* (non-origination of the universe) is a realizational fact, *ajāta-vāda* cannot be maintained philosophically in the realm

86 In the case of the *pūrṇa jñānī* (*jīvanmukta*), where there is a semblance of individuality, the universe also appears as a semblance without any power of delusion. He always remains aware of the true nature of his Self and the world as Brahman, and conducts all his activities free from attachment and delusion, just like an actor in a drama.

87 Cf. "*Uttamaḥ brahma-sadbhāvo, dhyānabhāvastu madhyamaḥ,*
stutiḥ japaḥ adhamaḥ bhāvaḥ, bahiḥpūjā adhamādhamā."
(*Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* 14.122)

of duality in the sense of non-appearance of the universe. Shankara accepts and propounds the three-fold *sattā* (validity) of Reality from the *vivarta* point of view. The *vyāvahārika* and *prātibhāsika sattā* relate to the universe, and the experiences and functioning within it. In the *pāramārthika-sattā* (absolute validity) point of view, *ajāta-vāda* is implied, for it asserts, on the basis of *śruti*, that *"Brahma satyam, jagat mithyā; jivo brahmaiva na aparaḥ*—Brahman is the only Reality and it is changeless; the *jagat* (universe) is unreal and is a Mayic appearance superimposed on Brahman; and the apparent individual soul (*jīva*) is nothing but Brahman."[88]

c. Sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi- and *Dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vādas*

The *Sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi-vāda*, as explained in the *Vedānta-Saṁjñā-Mālikā*, seems to be for those who accept *Īśvara-sṛṣṭi* (creation by a personal God)—either through His glance (*īkṣaṇa*) or will (*saṁkalpa*)—prior to our perception of it. It is a dualistic theological view. Probably that is why it is said to be for *adhama-adhikāri* (inferior candidate), for in this view the duality of *jīva-Īśvara* (soul and God) ever remains, and the universe too has real permanent existence; thus there will be three eternal realities.

The *Dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda* can be of two types: One is from the point of view of Brahman/Atman, the Universal Self, which is the Universal Consciousness and the substratum and source of all empirical consciousness, patent or latent, in all beings and entities. From this point of view, nothing can exist independent of Universal Consciousness, for everything rises in it and merges into it like waves.[89] Hence, all things derive their relative existence and

---

88 The following words of the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* 2.32 are also found in Shankara's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 574: *"Na nirodho na ca utpattiḥ na baddho na ca sādhakaḥ; na mumukṣuḥ na vai muktaḥ iti eṣā paramārthatā*—There is neither dissolution nor origination; there is none bound and no spiritual aspirant; there is none seeking liberation nor the liberated one—this indeed is the highest Truth"—for there always exists only the changeless non-dual infinite Brahman.

89 Existence apart from Universal Consciousness has no meaning, for exist-

validity because of the Atman, the very principle of existence and revelation.[90] This view, however, does not say things do not exist, but holds that they do not exist by themselves apart from Atman, just as the waves cannot exist apart from the sea. But things can exist apart from individualized consciousness (*jīva*), just as different waves can exist apart from each other, and individuals have to perceive and deal with them as they present themselves to their empirical consciousness. This is something akin to *Sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi-vāda*, so far as the individual is concerned, but on the cosmic

---

ence is always associated with awareness of a being or entity by itself or by others. Hence pure Existence and pure Consciousness are synonymous.

Modified existence as things is modified consciousness; this is very evident in the dream state. It is only because of latent consciousness that entities possess the power of revealing themselves to other conscious beings. Moreover, space, time, and causation, in which all things exist and function, are not entities, and do not exist independent of consciousness. The knowledge that a thing exists, it is such and such, it does not exist, or it exists apart from consciousness, are modes of consciousness only. Such declarations are objectively meaningful as external facts, and are applicable in life and functioning, only in the case of embodied limited consciousness. The whole universe and all the beings and entities in it rise like waves from the ocean of Universal Consciousness, rest in it, and disappear into it, even as the dream world does from the individual sub-conscious mind. [Mythologically, in *Vaiṣṇavism*, *Mahā-Viṣṇu*, the all-pervading Reality, the Supreme Being and Lord of the universe *Śrī Ranganātha* (the Lord of the Stage) is conceived as sleeping in a state of yoga (*yoga-nidrā*) in the primeval ocean of causal waters (*kāraṇa-samudra*, known as *kṣīra-sāgara*), on the serpent Śeśa, the residual impressions (*śeśa*) of the previous creation-cycle, and the universe arises like His dream.] Just as the dream world and the beings in it with all their functioning do not exist outside the sub-conscious mind of the individual dreamer, the waking universe and its beings and their activities too do not exist outside the Universal Consciousness, the 'Universal Dreamer'. (Cf. *Tai. Up.* 3.1.1: *Yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti, yat-prayanti-abhisaṁviśanti . . . tad brahma.*)

The existence of the universe apart from Universal Consciousness cannot be proved or asserted, for he who has to prove it, and him to whom it is to be proved, are themselves objects of consciousness and part of the universe.

90 Cf. Shankara's commentary on *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.20: *"Tadātmanā vinirmuktam asat saṁpadyate*—Bereft of the Self, entities lose their being."

scale. Again, consciousness too, both individual and universal, can exist without objects, as exemplified in deep sleep and realized in samadhi (transcendental state). Consciousness is primary in experience, and consciousness of objects secondary. Hence, the universe has no permanent or independent existence of its own apart from Universal Consciousness, and as such is only an appearance in Universal Consciousness.

The other type of *Dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda* refers to individual creation or *jīva-sṛṣṭi*, that is, that the world is related to individual consciousness. When the individual perceives, the things are there or come into being: and when he does not, they do not exist. This can be true only of the individual's dream world, which is entirely related to his own sub-consciousness, from where thoughts manifest as things. It is analogous to Universal Consciousness, so far as the dream world is concerned. However, the minds of persons within the dream world, including that of the dreamer's dream-personality within it, or even the empirical part of the mind of the dreamer, cannot create things even within the dream. The dreams arise spontaneously from the sub-conscious mind. One has to perceive them as they come. This again is somewhat akin to *sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi* so far as the dream is concerned. Similarly, creation by the individual empirical consciousness or by the perception of the individual cannot be substantiated in the case of the waking-state world.

Some say that *dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi* by an individual in the *jāgrat* or waking state world is rational and is supported by science. We do not think science has anything to do with or gives support to any of these philosophical views. At the most science shows that the world is not as we see it or as it appears to us, *and not that the world itself is an appearance*, or that we bring it into existence, or that it depends on our perception. It asserts the independent reality of matter/energy and its formations. Science is 'materialistic' at present, and does not deny the absolute validity of the world. It is empirical in its approach and limits itself to the world. But in Western philoso-

phy there is a view analogous to *Dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda* called 'Solipsism' or Subjective Idealism. It is generally rejected as irrational and not according with facts.

Though the mind or consciousness is a necessary instrument in all our perception, and our views of the world and things are coloured by our mind—in that sense the view is subjective—things exist apart from the individual mind. For instance, suppose you see a temple. Even when you close your eyes, and do not see it, others with you there can see the same temple. Further, when you open your eyes, though you do not see the temple exactly as it was before—the previous temple—you cannot by your wish see the temple as a tree or a cow. You will see only the temple, though it is not exactly the same. When a fire is burning a house, if you close your eyes or run away, it does not stop burning. When you come back, you will see no house there; it is burnt, and you cannot create it again by your perception, for it does not depend on your consciousness. Things no doubt change. For that, one does not have to close one's eyes. That change is not caused by one's non-perception. All things are affected by time and are constantly changing. So even with open eyes, we do not see the same thing for even two seconds, though we do not recognize the fact. Further, even our body, senses, and mind, which themselves are part of the world, are constantly changing. Since we cannot create things by our mere perception, we have to perceive different things as they are presented to us—a tree as a tree, a man as a man, a cow as a cow, etc.—and witness all the changes that take place in them. And since they are commonly seen by others also, though our evaluation of things may be coloured by our mind, we cannot substantiate *Dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda* from the individual point of view. Moreover, it cannot explain purposeful activity. Hence things can exist apart from individual consciousness, though not apart from Universal Consciousness, which determines the nature of things and time-space-causation, based on which we act. In the individual case the only correct inference warranted is that one cannot perceive

things apart from one's consciousness, and not that they depend upon one's consciousness or perception.[91]

d. An alternative view

The whole subject can be put in another way. There is only one Absolute Spiritual Reality (*Sat* or Brahman), which is apparently dichotomized or polarized into subject and object, within the framework of time, space, and causation, amenable to change and activity, by its inscrutable Maya-power. Since the subject and object are the same one Reality—apparently polarized, which continues as the substratum of both and as the source and unchanging witness of all experience—*they are of the same substance and have the same status and validity, though they apparently differ diametrically.* When, in the waking state, the perceiving subject considers himself as a

---

91 Though waking, dream, and deep sleep are the three states in which empirical consciousness manifests, the waking state is distinctive. Plato asks at one place: "How can you determine whether at this moment we are sleeping, and all our thoughts are a dream; or whether we are awake, and talking to one another in the waking state?" (*Theaetetus* 158.b) We may answer it like this: (1) In deep sleep we are aware of only that state. (2) In dream (during which we take it as waking), there is the awareness of that state, and sometimes of sleep—for in dream also we dream that we sleep—but not of another waking state. (3) In waking, which we take as waking, we are also aware of dream and sleep, and it is at this stage that the question arises and is discussed as to the relative merit of the three different states, as Plato has done and many others also do. We, in waking, also contemplate a state distinct from all these three: the *Turīya* or samadhi.

Hence the waking state is quite distinct from the dream state, though from a higher point of view all the three states are but conditions of consciousness. In fact, we call a dream a 'dream' only in the waking state. Moreover, we also have in the waking state a conception of a Reality beyond the three states and of our real Self as the witness of all the three states, and also of the possibility of realising our true transcendent Self or Atman.

In dream, suppose one sees a tiger pursuing him; after running about to escape without success, the helpless dreamer suddenly feels: "If I wake up I will escape from the tiger." Similarly, when a waking person is pursued by worldly troubles, he gets the idea: "If I wake up to my higher Self, the world will not trouble me. It will disappear like the tiger in the dream."

psycho-physical being, subject to changes, *the rest of the universe* is also perceived as an objective physical entity with other psycho-physical beings, subject to changes, functioning within the empirical time-space-causation. When in the dream state, the perceiving subject within the dream has a dream personality which is mental in nature, the objective universe and the beings in it are also mental, and the dream world has its own framework of volatile time-space-causation.[92] When in the deep-sleep state, there is no personality of the perceiving subject; the universe also is not perceived as an object with its time-space-causation. Both are in abeyance.[93] When

92 The dichotomization of one reality into bipolar subject and object is very clearly seen in the dream, where the one mind itself appears as the subject as well as the object. The dreamer remains as the witness of both.

93 One may say, though the empirical universe disappears for the individual during the dream- and deep-sleep states, it is present for others and will also reappear to the individual on waking. But here the perception of the particular individual or the modes of his waking consciousness—when, even though he may not be aware of some things in the universe, he is aware of some other things and of the universe itself—are not referred to. What is referred to is the experience of consciousness itself in the different states through which every individual passes. These are natural states and common to all individuals, and the nature of their experience too is the same in the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. Hence common discussion and evaluation of the three states is possible. So they can be taken as universal scientific facts. For example, when a person is looking at the moon through a powerful telescope, he has a different view of it with the mountains and valleys etc. seen clearly, while the others continue to see it in the ordinary way. If each one of them sees the moon by turns through the telescope, each one sees in the same way as the first one did, while the others, including those who have already seen through the telescope, continue to see the moon as before in the ordinary way. Yet, they all have now the common conviction of a different idea of the moon as seen through the telescope, which is considered factual and is held to be scientifically valid for all. Similar is the case with reference to the three states of consciousness.

However, since everyone finds a changed empirical universe when they come to the waking state from dream or deep sleep, one may say that the universe must have an independent existence. This is true with regard to the individualized consciousness, and not Universal Consciousness. But the issue is clinched in the samadhi experience, when the individual consciousness is merged in the Universal Consciousness and the individual realizes

in samadhi, one realizes oneself as Atman (the Universal Pure Consciousness beyond name and form, the substratum of individual consciousness), and is aware of only the Infinite Brahman (Universal Pure Consciousness) as one with the Self, beyond subject-object relationship, beyond all duality, beyond all time-space-causation; there is neither the universe nor its perceiver. Only the non-dual Absolute Brahman, the erstwhile witness of the appearance and disappearance of the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep, remains beyond words and thought, as Pure Awareness.

Whether the universe is perceived or not, whether it is valid or not, whether it is independent of one's consciousness or not, depends on one's own condition of personality and the state of one's realization. In each stage the universe is of the same substance as, and has as much validity as, the perceiving individual subject.

We may conclude by saying that the empirical universe is characterized by *sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi* from the point of view of the individual

---

his real nature as Brahman/Atman, which transcends the three states. Then one has a clear and unshakable conviction that the universe, including all beings and one's own empirical personality, is only an appearance, like a dream, without any real independent existence, and that Atman/Brahman is the only Reality, just as a man who has woken up has the conviction with regard to the unreality of the dream he saw, though during the dream, the dream world appeared to exist independent of his dream personality, and of the other individuals within it. An awakened person will not feel or say, "Though the dream world has disappeared for me who was in the dream world and have woken up, it exists for the other beings who were seen by me in the dream." So far as his dream world is concerned, he is the only reality and the source of the appearance of the dream world. Similarly, on realization of Brahman as the Self, one's empirical personality and its correlate, the universe with all its beings, disappear, or appear like shadows if he retains the semblance of a personality; and he knows that Brahman is the only Reality, the Source of the appearance of the universe. It is only in samadhi, the truly Awakened State, that the empirical personality really disappears—in other states it remains merely in abeyance. In deep sleep he perceives the absence of everything; in samadhi he is aware of the Blissful Non-dual Infinite Brahman alone, and does not perceive the absence of anything, just as the person woken up from dream sees a greater reality everywhere, and not the absence of the dream world.

(*jīva*), by *dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi* or *īkṣaṇa-sṛṣṭi* from the point of view of the Universal Consciousness (Atman/Brahman) and God (*Īśvara*), and *ajāta* from the point of view of Absolute Reality (Transcendent or *Nirguṇa* Brahman, or Pure Self (*Śuddha-ātman*).

30. The Phenomenal *Īśvara*

It may be asked by some: Is a 'phenomenal *Īśvara*' of any use? Yes, very much, for He is verily the Supreme *Sat-cit-ānanda* Brahman, personalized. Moreover, the universe and our personality too are phenomenal. 'Phenomenal' does not mean temporary—that *Īśvara* will disappear, while we remain. No, He is ever there in time. He is there as long as the universe and *jīva*s exist; as long as time, space, and causation exist. Nor does it mean that He is subject to phenomena. No, He is their Master—He is *Māyādhīśa*. Should we turn away from the sun and refuse its light because one day it may get cold? Should we cease to consider the Ganga holy and refuse to use its waters for sanctification because one day it may dry up? Why are we then attached to our forefathers and great men and women who are dead and gone? Why should we be attached to our own body, which is subject to decay and death? All these are part of, and subject to, phenomena and are very ephemeral. Yet, *Īśvara* is their Master; He is coexistent with the universe and the *jīva*s, and He is Brahman Itself in His Absolute aspect. As such, we can establish different types of loving relationships with Him, and He can give us Eternal Bliss and True Knowledge; and if we take recourse to Him, He will also help us to cross over Maya (*Mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etām taranti te—Gītā* 7.14). If we like we can retain our personal relationship with him forever in time. *Īśvara*'s *avatāra*s—Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, and others—are also phenomenal. Do we not love them and worship them as God?

Īśvara can also help us to realize the Absolute Brahman. For example, a script, though artificial and conventional, can help us to store knowledge and give us the joy derived from poetry, literature, sciences, etc. A script has no existence by itself apart from its

relationship to our minds. An aeroplane, even though designed and built by us, can give us the joy of flight in the air and help us to cross the seas and continents. An artificially put up target can help us to correct our aim. An image of God, also conceived and fashioned by man, can help us to realize God. Similarly, the spiritual image of Brahman, the Perfect *Īśvara*, though phenomenal, can help us to realize Brahman by perfecting our minds. (See note 80, p. 93.)

We find in life that when we devote ourselves to and concentrate our mental energies (*saṁyama*) on any entity or aspect of existence, our knowledge regarding it increases, and we also become more and more familiar with and attracted towards it. By the same psychological law, if we devote ourselves to the spiritual existence of *Īśvara*, our understanding of *Īśvara* increases, we love Him all the more, and we also gain the knowledge of His true nature. (*Bhaktyā mām abhijānāti yāvān yaścāsmi tattvataḥ; tato mām tattvato jñātvā viśate tadanantaram—Gītā* 18.55; also see 11.54.) An entity will reveal its nature and secrets only to those who apply their minds and investigate, and not to those who keep away from it, holding that such a thing does not exist (cf. *Kaṭha* Up. 2.3.12, 13). Even to know *definitely* that such and such a thing does not exist, or that the idea about it is wrong, we need investigation (cf. *Tai.Up.* 3.1–6).

31. What is Sublated?

It is a common thing that we symbolically personify non-personal realities which help and inspire us: a country as mother (*Bhārata-mātā*), a river as mother (*Gaṅgā-mātā*), wisdom (*Sarasvatī*), wealth (*Lakṣmī*), sun (*Sūrya-nārāyaṇa*), a mantra (*Gāyatrī*), etc. and even worship them with devotion. Thus we see that the bhaktas' fear that "God is rendered unreal and sublated; how can we then have real bhakti?" is unfounded. Rather, far from sublation, *Īśvara* is identified with the Absolute Reality, Brahman. They forget there is no such prospect of sublation of the fact of *Īśvara* in time, and as long as the *jīva*-hood of anybody lasts, for *jīva-jagat-Īśvara* are mutual correlates and come and go together. It is Brahman which appears

as the triad. As such, only *the conceptions of Brahman as Īśvara and the universe* are sublated for the particular enlightened individual, if and when his *jīva* merges in Brahman giving up its *jīva*-hood, and it happens in that state only and never before. If he returns to the phenomenal world, the relationship also returns for him, though he is no more deluded, since he has the memory of realization. *It is only conceptions and conditioned experiences that are sublated and never real entities.* When a deity is worshipped through a clay image, and after worship it is consigned to the river, it is the image that is consigned—not the deity. Our views of Reality, and not existent entities, are sublated. In enlightenment the conception of *Īśvara-jīva-jagat* is sublated and they are realized as the non-dual Brahman itself.

We do not cease to take real interest in the world, just because the body will be destroyed soon and the experiences will cease; or because the world is ever-changing and will come to an end when the sun cools down; or because there is no 'real' hard matter, and it is all only energy particles, as discovered by modern science. We do not throw away a diamond just because it is scientifically said to be only carbon. We do not cease to worship in the temple with devotion because the images are made of stone or metal. Therefore, the objection against the Advaita position that it renders God unreal and does away with devotion is more sentimental than rational or substantial.

32. Standard of Judgement and Correlation

Often there is a double standard involved in understanding the statement 'The world is unreal'. We think that the world we see as an object before us is said to be unreal; but we assume that we, the empirical persons who are seeing it, are real, for we feel our reality as persons. That is not so. What is meant is, from the transcendental point of view, the world, *including the empirical persons who are seeing it*, is unreal, for they are also a part of the world, and both in reality are nothing but Brahman. It may be compared to the

dream-universe and the persons functioning within it, which are all unreal from the waking-state point of view, for the whole thing is the manifestation of the sleeping person's mind. As long as the persons functioning within the dream are 'real', the dream-universe also is 'real'. Hence relatively the world is as real or as unreal as the empirical person. If the empirical person is 'real', a notion very difficult to give up, the world and its values are also 'real' in the same degree. Whether in waking or dream, the relative validity of entities remains.

We may put it this way: *The subject who perceives and the object perceived are constituted of the same entity or substance and have the same grade of reality and status.* If the empirical perceiving subject in the waking state has a physical material reality, such as the body, so has the universe of the waking state of which the body is a part, and it has its own more or less fixed laws of time-space-causation. If the subject functioning in the dream state is constituted of the mind, so is the dream-universe, and it has the same grade of reality as the dream subject with its own fluid laws. In the deep-sleep state, the perceiving subject has no experienced personality; the universe too has no experienced form. And in the transcendent-state (*turīya*), the perceiving 'subject' is the Infinite Atman, the Absolute Pure Consciousness; the 'object' too is the Infinite Brahman, the Absolute pure Consciousness (*Prajñānam Brahma*). Here the duality of subject-object ceases in identity, since the polarising Maya ceases to be operative and the infinite Reality alone remains, call it Atman or Brahman.

Similarly, *jīva* and *Īśvara* being correlates, i.e. part and whole, they are constituted of the same type of personality at all levels and planes, that is, gross, subtle, and causal; only *jīva* is associated with the individual and the finite personality, and *Īśvara* is associated with the universal and the infinite personality. When *Īśvara* is Absolute Brahman, *jīva* is Absolute Atman, and since the universe projected by Maya does not intervene here, the distinction which caused the part-and-whole relationship ceases, and identity is re-

vealed. It is because *jīva* and *Īśvara* are correlates that *jīva* is naturally attached to and loves *Īśvara*, and finally finds identity with Him in Brahman/Atman.

Why is all our empirical knowledge, subjective and objective, distorted and vitiated? The root cause lies in this: We are looking at the internal and external universe through the psycho-physical complex, which itself is part of the universe. Thus we have divided the universe into two, and one part of it is studying another part, as it appears to it. So we are not studying the *'uni-verse'* but only a *'semi-verse'*. As such our empirical views are not real views, but conditional ones. When we can stand aside from the psycho-physical complex and view the universe as a whole, then only can we have true knowledge of the whole of objective existence and realize that it is all Brahman. Until then all our knowledge is condemned to relativity; it is mediate knowledge (*parokṣa jñāna*) as it appears through the ever-shifting psycho-physical medium. The im-mediate knowledge (*aparokṣa jñāna*) may not be possible empirically, but we can closely approximate to it by detachment and abstraction through moral and spiritual disciplines, and by shedding personal equations and desires. When we realize it in samadhi, when the mind is at-one with the Reality and merges in it, our mind bears the impress of it when we come back to the empirical plane, and our whole life and attitudes get transformed by the impression of that realization of non-dual Reality.

33. Does the Transcendental View Affect Empirical Life?

We saw that empirically there are different grades of reality and unreality. While Brahman-Atman alone is absolutely and always Real, all Its manifestations through Maya, within the framework of time-space-causation, have relative or phenomenal reality, derived from Brahman, their substratum, their duration varying *in time*, from momentary existence to relatively eternal existence, and their power and knowledge too varying from meagreness to omnipotence and

omniscience. However, what is to be remembered is that, whether these assumed forms of Brahman—the correlatives *Īśvara-jīva-jagat*, and bondage and freedom etc.—are considered real or unreal from the transcendental plane, their mutual relationships remain the same on the empirical plane, as they have the same empirical status and reality, with their respective roles to play in the game of the universe. It does not affect our practical life in any way, since the means and ends, rewards and punishments, will remain the same according to the rules of the game, whether we consider them 'real' or 'unreal'. If the universe is held to be unreal, then the rewards and punishments also must be considered as unreal, as in a dream. Our ethics and morality, our aspirations and achievements, remain relatively valid, as in the case of day and night: day and night are true and valid to those living on earth, and their life is conditioned accordingly, though they may not be true for one far out in space, and do not exist at all for the sun which is ever illumined.

What then is gained by knowing the highest Truth? Just as the physicist's view of matter and the nature of the physical universe—that it consists of very subtle intangible fundamental particles—gives, without affecting the ordinary life, a new dimension to our understanding of the physical universe; by knowing the Highest Truth, we understand the real nature of the entire phenomenal universe and of ourselves. This will help us to evaluate things and events properly and to rise above all *dvandva*s or pairs of opposites. It will enable us to cultivate equanimity, serenity, detachment, compassion, love for all beings, and freedom from ego, rising above all petty selfishness. Such a person will always experience inwardly the Bliss of realization of his true Self—which is also the Self of all beings—freed from all doubts and fears. While the ignorant man, attached to his personality, taking things as 'real', undergoes elation and dejection constantly and is haunted by innumerable hopes and fears, the wise man remains inwardly peaceful and happy, and fulfils his role efficiently as in a drama, without being affected by the circumstances of external life.

Therefore, as long as *jīva*-hood exists, and we are within the rules of the game of the universe, all empirical relationships and activities do obtain and are completely valid and real on that plane, just as in the case of a sovereign and his subjects, and the state and its laws—which, though these are man-made contingent relationships, are nevertheless binding as long as they last. Of course, *Īśvara* being Brahman, our own inner Self, He can become an object of intense love,[94] whereas a sovereign can command only loyalty. Our love and devotion to our parents, guru, and others is not unreal empirically though the relationship is temporal, and they, as well as we, all pass away. In fact, we think of *Īśvara* and His *Śakti* as parents of the universe (*jagataḥ pitarau vande Pārvatī-Parameśvarau*). After all, nothing loses its essential reality. What are lost or sublated are only names and forms, including our own.

Again, Shankara does not anywhere ask us to discriminate and give up *Īśvara*, who is the Oversoul, as unreal. Rather he affirms *Īśvara* always as *sarvajña*, *sarveśvara*, and *kāruṇika*, that He is none other than Brahman, and we that have to seek His grace to realize the Truth. (See *Gītā Bhāṣya* 2.39: *"Īśvara-prasāda-*

---

94 We do not, in fact, love anyone for the sake of the body, but on account of the Self within. The body is ever changeful, and will be consigned to fire when life departs. But still, we continue our love. We love our beloveds, even when they are sickly or meet with an accident and become deformed. We love even animals. Everything becomes lovable when it is favourably associated with oneself and gives joy. Therefore, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* declares that husband, wife, children, wealth, etc. and everything else become lovable only because of the Self (Atman): *"Na vā are patyuḥ kāmāya patiḥ priyo bhavati, Ātmanaḥ tu kāmāya patiḥ priyo bhavati. . . . Na vā are sarvasya kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavati, Ātmanaḥ tu kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavati."* (2.4.5).

Moreover, love is always spontaneous. The *gopī*s loved Krishna spontaneously; they did not stop to consider his Godhood etc. They loved the simple Vrindavan cowherd-Krishna, with the flute in hand, and not the King Krishna of Mathura, with his majesty etc. Other great devotees also did not stop to consider the relative merits and superiority of their chosen deities (*Iṣṭa*). Many identified their *Iṣṭa*, whether Vishnu, Shiva, Surya, Ganapati, Devi, Rama, Krishna, or any other Deity, with *Īśvara*, and many

nimitta jñānaprāpteḥ"; also *Vivek.* 416: "*Prajñayā eva taret vidvān Īśvarānugṛhītayā.*") He asks us to discriminate regarding who we really are; and when we know our true nature, we transcend our personality, and with it the universe also. *Īśvara* remains in His true nature as Brahman.

34. Can the Non-personal Brahman Serve as Personal *Īśvara*?

One may, however, raise an objection: It is understandable that the Supreme *Īśvara* as a personal God in His own right, with innumerable powers and blessed qualities or attributes, can do wonderful things, and assume forms. But, though we may conceive of Brahman, through the *upādhi* or adjunct of the universe, as *Īśvara*—as its Lord and Soul, which Its inscrutable innate Maya-power has spontaneously and mysteriously projected, still, how can the Absolute Brahman, which is *nirguṇa-nirākāra* (formless and attributeless) and not a person, act as *Īśvara*? It is indeed a very intelligent and subtle question. But a little analysis will make the position clear.

In the first instance, *Īśvara* and we are not separate from Brahman in our true nature. Brahman is not devoid of consciousness like the scientists' material reality, Consciousness being Its very nature. Though It is beyond all phenomenal attributes and forms which we conceive of, It is *Satyam-jñānam-anantam* (i.e. Absolute Existence-Knowledge/Consciousness-Infinity) and hence of the nature of Absolute *Ānanda* (Bliss) as well. It is the source of the universe, manifesting innumerable relative forms, powers, and attributes. Though Brahman is not a Person, in the phenomenal sense, It is the source and substance of all personalities, through Its power of Maya.

---

others with the Supreme Brahman or with both aspects. This becomes clear when we go through the numerous hymns addressed to those deities. In the *Rāmanāma Saṁkīrtana* it is sung: "Rāma is the Supreme Pure Absolute; who, within time-space causation, is the *Parameśvara* . . . who is now worshipped as the 'son of Daśaratha'—*Śuddha brahma parātpara rāma, kālātmaka parameśvara rāma.*"

In fact, personality is nothing but the *Cit* (*jñānam*) aspect of Brahman manifesting individually and collectively, through the 'material' bodies projected from Its *Sat* aspect, and manifested spontaneously and sportively (*līlā*) by virtue of Its *Ānanda* aspect, by Its power of Maya.[95] Even an insentient power like electricity, when associated with material equipment like computers and other electronic gadgets, accomplishes wonderful work. Much automation is done through electronic gadgets. However, electricity needs extraneous intelligence to guide it and associate it with gadgets, whereas Brahman is of the nature of Intelligence itself (*Cit*).

Being Infinite, and beyond time, space, and causation, Brahman is beyond all forms. Brahman is trans-personal and is called 'It', because It cannot be characterised as 'He' or 'She'—or as a combination of both—since these are only phenomenal concepts. Pure *Sat* or *Being* is beyond all such characterizations, just as one cannot characterize knowledge as he or she or as a person, though we do personify it as Sarasvatī. And what is really meant by *nirguṇa* is that no attributes which we experience and conceive of objectively can be applied to Brahman. It being the Non-dual Infinite (*advaitam*, *anantam*), the distinction between quality and substance that is made in normal usage is not valid in Brahman. These attributes or qualities are the products of the three *guṇas* of Maya, which rests in Brahman like heat in fire without affecting It, being Its very nature. Fire is not hot to itself, but only to others who feel it. When we say fire is hot, we are superimposing our notions or experiences of fire on it. Similarly, though Brahman is *nirguṇa*, It is the source of all the *guṇas*. We feel and experience all the phenomenal *guṇas* produced by Its Maya, like the heat of fire, in our dualistic phenomenal

---

95 Of the three phenomenal 'aspects' of Brahman, *Sat*, *Cit*, *and Ānanda*, the *Sat* (Existence) aspect is manifest in all beings—sentient and insentient; in minds, besides *Sat*, the *Cit* (Consciousness or Knowledge) aspect is manifested; and in pure modes of the mind (*sāttvika buddhi*), besides *Sat-cit*, the *Ānanda* (Bliss) aspect also is manifested. In its fourth dimension (*Turīya*), the source of the other three aspects, Brahman is *Ananta* (Infinite), beyond all phenomenal descriptions.

existence, and superimpose them on Brahman, and call It *Saguṇa Brahman* or *Īśvara.* (See note 50, p. 73).

Even the Supreme Personal God, *Īśvara*, being infinite, has no definite form; and we cannot say whether *Īśvara* is 'He' or 'She', or what else. Religionists have differently conceived 'Him', since nobody knows or can know objectively exactly what God is. Again, when 'He' acts, He has to act through His powers. Then actually, it is His powers that act spontaneously through 'Him'. One may say that they act through His will. But even His will or thought is His power and emerges spontaneously, for if we conceive of its emergence from another will or thought, then we fall into a *regressus ad infinitum.* Then we may say, He and His powers are identical. In that case too we have to grant that *Īśvara's* activities take place spontaneously, since He is not deliberately using His powers, for deliberation or will is again an act which must arise by itself. God was quiet. Then 'He' willed. What is it that made Him give up His quietude and will? Either we have to assume an extraneous stimulus or accept that the will operates spontaneously. Hence it cannot be caused or be time-bound.

Again, suppose the personal *Īśvara* is the Soul and the universe is His body. Then, the powers vest in Him—the Soul of the universe—and He acts through the body. In this case also, the powers within must be first motivated by the Soul, which in itself is formless, and the Soul is not apart from the body. If the Soul has to motivate the powers, It has to think or will, and the will has to arise spontaneously. If the will has to be produced by an act, then that act again has to be willed; thus we move in a circle. So we have to accept spontaneous origination.

If one says, the Soul and body are inseparably one, then also the will must first arise spontaneously; then other activities can take place by the power of the will. Even if the powers are vested in the body, the will must first arise spontaneously, either from the Soul or from the body, and not as the result of an act which itself depends on the will as shown before. Thus whether *Īśvara* 'acts' through

personality or without it, with organs or without organs, all that happens happens spontaneously by His mere presence (*yasya sannidhi mātreṇa*).[96] This is designated the *līlā* of *Īśvara* or Maya of Brahman, both having the same significance.

Thus Maya-power also arises *spontaneously from Brahman without Its willing*, and projects the universe and its beings, and makes all life's activities possible, just as fire radiates heat and light *spontaneously*, and not as an act of its will. Hence it is possible for Brahman conceived as *Īśvara* to act spontaneously. In fact, they are not two different entities.[97] Because He is infinite and perfect (*pūrṇa*), and

---

96 It is owing to this fact that *Īśvara* or Brahman remains untouched by all spontaneous effects of Maya which we experience and again superimpose on Him or It. Even we, as Pure Self, really do not perform any actions, but due to wrong identification with the psycho-physical organism and its activities, and the consequent delusion, we consider that we do them. So the *Gītā* says:

- *Prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaih karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ*
  Ahaṁkāra vimūḍhātmā kartāhamiti manyate. (3.27)
- *Tattvavit tu mahābāho guṇakarma vibhāgayoḥ*
  Guṇā guṇeṣu vartante iti matvā na sajjate. (3.28)
- *Na kartṛtvam na karmāṇi lokasya sṛjati prabhuḥ.*
  Na karma-phalasaṁyogam svabhāvastu pravartate. (5.14)
- *Nādatte kasyacit pāpam na caiva sukṛtam vibhuḥ.*
  Ajñānena-āvṛtam jñānam tena muhyanti jantavaḥ. (5.15)
- *Jñānena tu tad-ajñānam yeṣām nāśitam ātmanaḥ*
  Teṣām ādityavat jñānam prakāśayati tatparam. (5.16)
- *Mayā tatamidaṁ sarvam jagat-avyaktamūrtinā.*
  Mat sthāni sarvabhūtāni na ca ahaṁ teṣu avasthitaḥ. (9.4)
- *Na ca matsthāni bhūtāni paśya me yogam-aiśvaram.* (9.5)
- *Na ca māṁ tāni karmāṇi nibadhnanti Dhanañjaya*
  Udāsīnavat-āsīnam asaktam teṣu karmasu. (9.9)
- *Tasya kartāram api mām viddhi akartāram-avyayam.* (4.13)
- *Yasya sannidhi mātreṇa deha-indriya-mano-dhiyaḥ*
  viṣayeṣu svakīyeṣu vartante preritā iva. (*Vivek.* 129)

97 When we think of Reality as Brahman then Maya is Its natural Power. When we think of It as *Īśvara*, the Lord of the Universe, then He controls it, and is not cognized by all since He envelops Himself with his creative Maya (*Yoga-māyā*). Cf. *Gītā* 7.25: *"Nāhaṁ prakāśaḥ sarvasya yogamāyā samāvṛtaḥ; mūḍho'yam na-abhijānāti loko mām ajam avyayam."*

of the nature of *Sat-cit-ānanda*, whatever spontaneously emerges from *Īśvara*, will be *Satyam-śivam-sundaram*. Thus when we think of Brahman as *Īśvara*, nothing has really changed; only we too remaining on the personal level can derive from Him whatever we want. *Īśvara* fulfils us in the way we approach Him, as we are His own; He is equal to all. Whatever one seeks from Him earnestly one gets spontaneously.[98] This is His grace. He is the ideal of perfection, and like a mirror showing us our image, helps us to correct ourselves and realize our true nature. Hence Brahman, though Itself neutral, as *Īśvara*, makes possible all our life's activities and ideals and helps us to perfect ourselves.

Thus there is really no difference between Brahman and *Īśvara*. One is a transcendental view of the Absolute Reality, and another as we see It phenomenally. It is like seeing the light through a prism or without it. The reality is one and the same. Brahman spontaneously appears to us as *Īśvara* when we look at It from within the universe. All names and forms and attributes arise spontaneously from Brahman through Maya-power, and we as empirical persons experience them as if they are other than Brahman, and relate them to It/Him as their cause. But in fact they are not other than Brahman. And when we relate the whole universe, *as we experience and understand it*, to Brahman, we think of Brahman as *Īśvara*. Just as when kingship is conferred on a person, he is called a king, and exercises all the powers of a king, though they are not integral to him, similarly, *Īśvara*, deriving His powers from Brahman—that is, Brahman as *Īśvara*—exercises all the powers of universal Lordship, as long as the universe and the *jīva*s exist.

Therefore, what is really meant by superimposition on Brahman is that we who find ourselves within the universe projected by Maya, endowed with a personality, superimpose our perceptions and con-

---

98 Cf. *Gītā* 4.11: *"Ye yathā mām prapadyante tān tathaiva bhajāmyahaṁ"*; 5.19: *"Ihaiva taiḥ jitaḥ sargo yeṣāṁ sāmye sthitaṁ manaḥ; nirdoṣam hi samam brahma tasmāt brahmaṇi te sthitāḥ"*; 9.29: *"Samo-ahaṁ sarva bhūteṣu na me dveṣyo-asti na priyaḥ."*

ceptions of the triad of *jīva*, *jagat*, and *Īśvara* on Brahman. That is why so many conceptions of *Īśvara* or God, the soul, and the universe are possible by different religions, philosophies, and sciences. Some conceive *Īśvara* as 'He', some as 'She', some as '*Ardhanārīśvara*', some with form, some without form; some as Trinity, some as Unity; and so on and so forth, according to different points of view, and some deny a creator-God altogether. Similarly, different people hold different views with regard to the soul and the universe.

If a personal creator-God can be conceived of as untouched by His creative activity and the evil in the world, it stands to reason that the trans-personal Brahman is untouched by the world itself, consisting of both evil and good. By accepting the idea of superimposition alone all these above conceptions are possible, and *Īśvara* can be placed beyond evil. *Mokṣa* too will be possible by the removal of the superimposition of *jīva*-hood on the Atman through right knowledge (*satya-jñāna*), free from wrong-knowledge (*mithyā-jñāna*). The mirror only shows your face. If you smile, you will get a smiling reflection; if you make a grimace, you will have that reflection. But the mirror, though reflecting both, is not affected by either. When you withdraw from it, the mirror is clean as it always was, without any reflection or image inside it. It was we who all along projected the image on to the mirror and saw it in the mirror, which nevertheless was functionally useful. While the mirror can reflect our image in the presence of physical light, Brahman reflects our conceptions, which are functionally valid in empirical life, when the effects of Maya cover up our knowledge (*Ajñānena-āvṛtam-jñānam tena muhyanti jantavaḥ—Gītā* 5.15).

35. Is Brahman Superior, or *Iśvara*?

Some theologians consider the personal *Īśvara* as the Supreme, and either reject Absolute Brahman or try to show It as a lower state of the Supreme *Īśvara*. They are also at pains to show *the absolute 'reality' of the created world*, like materialists, though it has no value in itself but only in relation to living beings as a means for gaining

experience and attaining perfection, just as an artificial target helps us to correct our aim. All religions exhort us to seek perfection in God, and not to set any store by this ever-changing world. The devotees of God are averse to coming back to this world, unless forced by karma; and in some religions they cannot come back at all, for they have only one life here.[99] So it should not matter very much, when we are exhorted to give up the world mentally and cultivate detachment, whether we do it considering the world of our life and experience as ultimately 'unreal', or as ever-changing, full of evil, and ephemeral, or both, though the first attitude will be helpful in cultivating detachment. However, Shankara—echoing the *Muṇḍaka* and other Upanishads—wants us to consider the world as Brahman Itself (*Brahma eva idam viśvam*; cf. *Vivek.* 227–31, 251), to give up only the wrong notions about it and about our personality, and to realise the identity of Brahman and Atman. Since there is nothing other than Brahman, he exhorts us to see the same Brahman/Atman in all beings in terms of the teachings of the Upanishads and the *Gītā*.[100]

It is really immaterial for Shankara, whether you derive Brahman from *Īśvara* or *Īśvara* from Brahman *in the Upanishadic sense*, for they are not two Realities.[101] He often uses them interchange-

---

99 Many do not accept any life after death or a return to this world. And they say, "Even if we return we have no memory of or identity with any past life; all those born are taken as new persons, and they too act as such." Some hold that the world will come to an end soon and once for all.

100 • *Yastu sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmanyeva-anupaśyati*
Sarva bhūteṣu ca ātmānam tato na vijugupsate.
• *Yasmin sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmaiva-abhūt vijānataḥ,*
Tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka ekatvam-anupaśyataḥ. (*Īśa Up.* 6, 7)
• *Sarvabhūtastham-ātmānam sarva-bhūtāni ca ātmani*
Īkṣate yoga-yuktātmā sarvatra sama-darśanaḥ. (*Gītā* 6.29)

101 To think of the superiority and inferiority of Brahman and *Īśvara* is as ridiculous as considering whether the *Bāla*-Krishna or the Krishna of the *Gītā* is superior. They are one and the same Reality; only chronologically, *Bāla*-Krishna is earlier in manifestation. One is the potential aspect, the other the kinetic or functional aspect. One may also liken them to to water and ice, as Sri Ramakrishna did. Water frozen is ice, and ice melted is water. You

ably, even as Brahman-Atman are used, in his commentaries on the *Gītā*, Upanishads, and *Brahma Sūtras*. There is neither superior and inferior, nor higher and lower, in the non-dual Infinite, beyond Maya, beyond time, space, and causation. They are the transcendent (*para*) and relative (*apara*) views of the same Reality. From the transcendent point of view, the Reality (Brahman) appears as the *Paramātman*, the Self of the universe, and as the Atman, the Self of us, the *jīva*s, who are a part of the universe; and we realise the identity of both through jnana by renouncing our personality. From the relative point of view, we consider the Reality as the Lord and Soul of the Universe (*Īśvara*), and of ourselves as the lord and soul of the body (*jīva*), and we approach Him through bhakti and merge in Him with our *sāttvika* personality, or remain with Him in His *loka* or plane of manifestation (*paramam padam*).[102] We may pursue any goal as per our choice. These are our viewpoints within Maya. At best we may say, those who like the *Cit* aspect of Reality prefer It as Brahman, and those who like the *Ānanda* aspect of Reality prefer It as *Īśvara*. However, when once we reach either of them, we will realize both, since the two are not different.[103] Then *the* Reality, beyond

---

may use them according to your needs. Similarly, the relative aspect of Brahman is *Īśvara*, and the transcendent aspect of *Īśvara* is Brahman.

102 *Br. Sū. Bhā.* 1.1.12 intro.: "*Evam ekam api brahma, apekṣita-upādhi-saṁbandhaṁ nirasta-upādhi-saṁbandhaṁ ca upāsyatvena jñeyatvena ca vedānteṣu upadiśyate.*" Cf. *Bhāgavata* 11.9.17, 18:

- *Eka-eva advitīyaḥ abhūt ātmā ādhāro akhilāśrayaḥ*
  Kālena-ātmānubhāvena, sāmyam nītāsu śaktiṣu;
  Sattvādiṣu ādipuruṣaḥ pradhāna-puruṣa-īśvaraḥ.
- *Parāvarāṇām paramaḥ āste kaivalya-samjñitaḥ*
  Kevalānubhavānanda-sandoho nirupādhikaḥ.

103 It is like approaching fire which is both bright and hot. A person seeking light to read may go to the fire. It will serve his purpose, but he will also get the warmth of fire, though he may not have sought it. Similarly, one who goes to seek the warmth of fire will also get its light. The first may be compared to a *Jñāna-mārgi*, and the second to a *Bhakti-mārgi*. *Karma-mārga* consists in gathering the fuel and rubbing the sticks to kindle the fire. Once it is kindled, the hidden fire in the fuel manifests, and gives both light and warmth by its own nature.

words and thoughts, presents Itself and engulfs us—our ego. What is that state—who can say? There is no duality there whatsoever.

36. Duality is not Final

A cognate idea of 'un-reality' is the expression *'as it were'* or *'as if'* (*iva*), which Shaṁkara frequently uses. This expression is often taken exception to. It is not that Shankara invented it. He has just taken up what the Upanishads themselves say to deny final duality in Existence: "Where there is duality as it were". (*E.g. "Yatra hi dvaitam-iva bhavati taditara itaram paśyati"—Bṛh. Up.* 2.4.14). As such the charge against him of teaching 'the wrong doctrine' that *dvaita* is not absolutely or metaphysically real, if it can be sustained, must be laid at the door of the *śruti* itself, and not leveled at Shankara. *Śruti* again and again denies *ultimate duality* and asserts that everything that we perceive is nothing but the Self (Atman) or Brahman.[104]

Some people argue that considering the world even metaphysi-

---

104 *Chā. Up.* 6.1.4: *"Vācāraṁbhaṇaṁ vikāro nāmadheyam mṛttiketyeva satyam."*

Kaṭha Up. 2.1.11: *"Mṛtyoḥ sa mṛtyuṁ gacchati ya iha nānā iva paśyati."*

Chā. Up. 6, sections 8–16: *"Sa ya eṣo aṇimā etad ātmyamidaṁ sarvaṁ tat satyam sa ātma tat-tvam-asi Śvetaketo."* (Repeated 9 times.)

Bṛh. Up. 2.4.5: *"Ātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānena idam sarvam viditam.*

Bṛh.Up. 2.5.14–15: *"Ayamātmā sarveṣam bhūtānām madhu asya ātmanaḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni madhu yah ca ayam asmin ātmani tejomayo amṛtamayaḥ puruṣo yaḥ ca ayamātmā tejomayo amṛtamayaḥ puruṣo ayameva sa yo ayamātmā idam amṛtam idam brahma idam sarvam. Sa vā ayam ātmā sarveṣām bhūtānām adhipatiḥ sarveṣām bhūtānām rājā tadyathā rathanābhau ca rathanemau ca arāḥ sarve samarpitā evameva asmin ātmani sarvāṇi bhūtāni sarve devāḥ sarve lokāḥ sarve prāṇāḥ sarva eta ātmanaḥ samarpitāḥ."*

And Brahman-Atman became all this through Its Maya-power.

Bṛh. Up. 2.5.19: *"Rūpam rūpam pratirūpo babhūva tadasya rūpam praticakṣaṇāya. Indro māyābhiḥ puru-rūpa īyate . . . bahūni ca anantāni ca tad etat brahma apūrvam anaparam anantaram abāhyam ayam ātmā brahma sarvānubhūḥ."* Cf. *Kaṭha Up.* 2.2.8–10.

cally unreal weakens moral and spiritual effort and leads to immorality. Some may say, "Since the world is unreal, my actions too are unreal," and go on committing immoral acts. But a little thought will show that this attitude does not stem from holding the world to be 'un-real', but from the double-standard adopted by such a person, who presumes that, though the world is unreal, he with his body is real. Apart from all that has been pointed out already on this topic, if he really thinks that the world is unreal like the dream, he has no incentive to commit any immorality, because nobody tries to obtain dream, or unreal, entities. Only because he thinks they are real does he strive to obtain them. Again, such people take their personalities and their desires as real and the world they see as unreal, and think they should be able to do whatever they like but be spared punishment. This is also not correct; they should consider the punishment also unreal, or cease from evil.

We also see in the world that those persons and nations who profess religions that consider the world very real and separate from God, commit more and greater crimes and atrocities than others, because of their greed and attachment. The more they consider the world to be real and separate from God, the more God becomes unreal to them. Hence, the *Īśa Upaniṣad* (1) advocates the divinization of the world and giving up of greed and attachment. If a person takes the world really as unreal, and if he is sincere, his attitude will be one of detachment to worldly objects, and he will strive to attain the Real, going beyond relative good and evil. And once he strives to see the same Real Brahman or Atman everywhere, he will have no delusions and will always be engaged in the welfare of all without any selfish interest (*sarvabhūta hite ratāḥ*). (See note 100, p. 120.) It is to exhort man to reach the Real, to see the Atman in all beings and be a blessing to all, that the world of duality is shown to be ultimately unreal, and not just for the sake of philosophical argument.[105]

---

105 In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, we find that Sri Ramakrishna often repeats: *"God alone is real and the world is unreal."* This did not affect his

37. The Character of Sri Shankara's Philosophy

It may also be pointed out here that for the Vedanta philosophy, the Vedanta or the Upanishads (the *śruti*) are the primary authority, and the *Brahma Sūtra*s and the *Gītā*, though very profound and helpful, being *smṛti*, are of secondary authority only, and have to be interpreted in harmony with the primary authority. However, Shankara finds no contradiction in them, since Brahman and personal *Īśvara* are not two realities, but two aspects of the same Reality. (*Dve vāva brahmaṇo rūpe, mūrtam caiva amūrtam ca—Bṛh. Up.* 2.3.1.) It is only those who do not accept the Upanishadic teachings and want to consider the personal *Īśvara* as not only the highest but also the only Reality, that find contradiction.[106]

Shankara's glory is that he systematizes the Upanishadic thought and realizations of the seers in such a way that it can accommodate, on the relative plane, all aspects of the various philosophies of the past, present, and future, including Buddhistic philosophy. Though their view-points may be different, they are acceptable in so far as they are rational and realizable, and not finally contradictory to the main theme of the Upanishads—based on direct and im-mediate realization—that there is an ultimate Infinite Spiritual Reality (Brahman) which is cognized in all beings as the Atman, and that both are identical. (Cf. *Yat sākṣāt aparokṣāt Brahma ya ātmā sarvāntaraḥ—Bṛh. Up.* 3.4.1). All the philosophies, including that of Advaita, are but different rational expressions at different levels, from different points of view (*darśana*), on the relative plane, with relative philosophical merits, of the same non-dual, Absolute Real-

---

devotion or moral conduct. Further, Sri Ramakrishna, 'the King of Devotees', accepts both the *Nitya* (Eternal) and the *līlā* (Sportive), that is, the transcendent and relative aspects of Brahman. He also declares that Brahman is beyond all words.

106 Cf. Shankara's commentary on *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* 3.17–18: "*Svasiddhānta vyavasthāsu dvaitino niścitā dṛḍham, parasparaṁ virudhyante taiḥ ayaṁ na virudhyate. Advaitam paramārtho hi dvaitam tat bheda ucyate, teṣām ubhayathā dvaitam tena-ayaṁ na virudhyate.*"

ity, beyond all empirical expressions, which can only be realized.[107] It is the Infinite, the *Pūrṇa.*

Śaṇkara's philosophy, therefore, is neither *Māyā-vāda*, as some would like to characterize it with an understandingless, derogatory overtone, nor *Īśvara-vāda*, nor even mere *Brahma-vāda.* It includes all these and much more. If it be a *vāda* at all, it is primarily *Ātma-vāda*, which establishes the supremacy of the Atman, which is identical with Brahman, *and is the only irrefutable Reality within the intuitive experience of all, at all times, as their very Self.*[108] In a sense his is not a *vāda* at all; he only rationally and systematically upholds the Upanishadic teachings and their supremely unique contribution, *Ātma-vidyā*, which no other philosophy or religion in the world has taught. Theistic religions and philosophies, hypothetical and speculative, are galore. But there is none which establishes the identity of

---

107 Shankara considers all the various speculations about the origin of the universe, etc. as only different stories. What is important is to realize the oneness of the Self and Brahman, the Absolute Reality, through direct or indirect means. He points out in his commentary on the *Ait. Up.* Chapter 4, intro.: *"Na hi sṛṣṭi ākhyāyikādi parijñānāt kiṁcit phalam iṣyate. Aikātmyasvarūpa parijñānāttu amṛtattvàm phalam sarvopaniṣat prasiddham."*

The whole of Section Two in Chapter Two of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* is devoted to the description of the glorious nature of Atman/Brahman, and exhorts man to realize It giving up all other vain talk, for It is the '*Bridge to Immortality*': *"Yasmin dyauḥ pṛthivī ca antarikṣam, otam manaḥ saha prāṇaiśca sarvaiḥ; tam eva ekam jānatha ātmānam, anyā vāco vimuñcatha amṛtasya eṣa setuḥ."* (*Muṇ.Up.* 2.2.5)

108 (Cf. note 12, p. 48, last 3 lines) Philosophically, the glory of the Self (Atman) is that It is the only pure and *ultimate subject* and centre of all experience; and the Universe, God, and even Brahman are, empirically, *Its objects*, though transcendentally in realization they are all identified in the Absolute Reality, *devoid of subject-object relationship.* When Atman is said to be one with the Infinite Brahman, it is to ward off the notion that It is finite, being intuited within; and when Brahman is pointed to as the Atman or Self of all, it is to ward off the notion that It is remote as an object, and is merely of an inferential character. Thus, the great *Brahman-Atman equation* gives us an existent, irrefutable, experiential, Infinite Absolute Reality. Of course, God is no other than Brahman relatively viewed. This makes Vedanta philosophy scientific, practical, and universal, instead of mere speculation, theological or otherwise.

jīva (as Atman) and Infinite Brahman (*jīvo-brahmaiva na-aparaḥ*), except the Upanishadic thought, based on direct realization. Moreover, it also delineates the way for its realization by all. Thus Advaita Vedanta affords humanity the Supreme Fulfilment (*niḥśreyasa*), than which there can be nothing greater. (*Yaṁ labdhvā cāparam lābham manyate na adhikam tataḥ—Gītā* 6.22; cf. also 7.2).

38. Contributions of Sri Shankara to Religio-Philosophic Thought

The great and unique contributions of Shankara to the Religio-Philosophic thought of the world are as follows:

1. He co-ordinated the profound spiritual insights and realizations of the Vedic seers, recorded in the Upanishads, and expounded the philosophy of Vedantic Non-dualism (Advaita), and founded it, for the first time, on the triple basis (*Prasthānatraya*) of the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sūtra*s and the *Gītā*, answering to spiritual tradition (*śruti*), rational investigation of Truth or Ultimate Reality (*yukti*), and Its actual verification or realization in life (*svānubhūti*). Thus he rescued philosophy from vain speculations, and religion from mere dogmatic beliefs, and gave to both of them a rational, scientific, and universal basis. By bringing these together to reinforce each other, he helped the evolution of a philosophic religion and spiritual science open to investigation, at once rational, comprehensive, and universally realizable by every competent person, even as in the case of physical sciences.
2. He gave a practical scientific foundation to philosophy by showing that the Absolute Spiritual Reality (Brahman), *cognized as the experiential Self* (*Atman*) *in all*, is the pure Subject within all and the basis of all our knowledge and experience.
3. He pointed out that Maya, the Power of Brahman, is a fact of empirical experience, but is *relativistic in nature*, i.e. in the state of identity of the pure Subject with Brahman, Maya and its products are not experienced. Maya is also the principle of ap-

parent diversification through time, space, and causation, operative in this variegated universe, which is its product (*Māyā-kalpita deśa-kāla-kalanā-vaicitrya-citrī-kṛtam*). The products of Maya too share its imponderable relativistic nature—i.e. empirically real, but transcendentally unreal, like dream objects on waking. (*Svakāle satyavat bhāti prabodhe sati-asat-bhavet* —*Ātmabodha* 6).

4. He showed that our empirical personality arises due to the mixing up through superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of the Self (pure Subject) and the not-Self (the psycho-physical organism, which, being a part of the objective universe, is an object). Hence all our empirical knowledge and activities, including those in the social, moral, scientific, philosophical, and religio-spiritual fields, are relativistic in nature, and have, therefore, only empirical, i.e. relative or conditional validity.
5. He established that the empirical self (*jīva*) in the individual is the phenomenal manifestation of the Supreme Self (Atman), which is identical with Brahman, the Absolute Spiritual Reality, and this identity is transcendentally realizable where the relativistic Maya ceases to be Maya and is identified with Brahman.
6. He declared that Brahman and *Īśvara* (Godhead) are one and the same Infinite Spiritual Reality, viewed from the transcendental or noumenal and the relative or phenomenal standpoints respectively—that is, from the *niṣprapañca* (devoid of the universe) and *saprapañca* (inclusive of the universe) points of view. The Supreme Brahman, when viewed as associated with the universe is *Īśvara*, and as associated with the individual is *jīva*. Thus *Brahman-Ātman-Māyā-Īśvara-jīva-jagat* are all non-different transcendentally, though they appear functionally different phenomenally for enacting the drama of the universe-game. They have validity in their respective spheres on the relative plane, just as the same H_2O can appear as water, ice, vapour, fog, frost, snow, foam, etc. under different conditions, exhibiting different properties. That Supreme Non-dual Reality (*Tat-sat*), where all

such phenomenal distinctions cease and which is beyond all empirical words and thought, is known to us prior to enlightenment only through the *śruti*, which is a record of supra-mental realizations.

7. He recognized and showed that within the framework of this comprehensive system of thought, all human desires and goals (*puruṣārthas*), secular achievements (*abhyudaya*) as well as religio-spiritual fulfilment (*niḥśreyasa*) (including gaining heaven or *Mukti*), are possible and can be meaningfully pursued by different persons according to their competence. For this purpose there are varied means and methods and different spiritual paths (*yoga*s) suitable to different persons and conditions.

Thus Shankara harmonized all aspects of the teachings of the Upanishads (Vedanta) and synthesized them with our empirical life, knowledge, and activities in his comprehensive system of thought, giving them all graded values and validity. He could do this by the epoch-making discovery of Maya as the principle of relativity and thus positing the *pāramārthika* (noumenal or transcendental) and *vyāvahārika* (phenomenal or empirical) views of Reality. His other great discovery, or rather rediscovery, is that the empirical self (*jīva*) is none other than the Supreme Self (Atman-Brahman), reflected in every being. Thus the infinite potentialities and perfection of the Supreme Self lie hidden in humanity, like the potentiality of a big banyan tree in a minute seed (*vata-kaṇikā*), and hence every one of us can manifest the Infinite Divine (Brahman) within by unfolding the potentialities and realizing the Truth. And to this realization he invites all humankind,[109] reiterating the clarion call of Vedanta: *"Śṛṇvantu viśve amṛtasya putrāḥ ā ye dhāmāni*

---

109 Cf. *Vivek.* 302:

Brahmānanda-nidhiḥ mahābalavatā ahaṁkāra ghora-ahinā
Saṁveṣṭya ātmani rakṣyate guṇamayaiḥ caṇḍaiḥ tribhirmastakaiḥ;
Vijñānākhya mahāsinā śrutimatā vicchidya śīrṣatrayam
Nirmūlya ahimimaṁ nidhiṁ sukhakaraṁ dhīraḥ anubhoktuṁ kṣamaḥ.

See also verses 2–5, 217, 251–264, 375–78, 394–95, 408–10, and 482 [*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2003)]

divyāni tasthuḥ; vedāhametam puruṣam mahāntam āditya varṇam tamasaḥ parastāt; tameva viditvā atimṛtyumeti nānyaḥ panthā vidyate ayanāya." (*Śve. Up.* 3.5, 3.8)

The great scientist Albert Einstein discovered the revolutionary Theory of Relativity and the immense potentialities of the atom in recent times. Shankara was the great 'Einstein' of the philosophical world who, more than twelve centuries ago, discovered *Maya as a Relativity Principle*, and the infinite spiritual potentialities and perfection of the soul as 'Atman'.[110] Besides, he is the brilliant sun of the religio-spiritual world illuminating the Himalayas of the Self.

It is only when we study Shankara in the historical perspective of the development and evolution of the various religio-philosophical concepts in the different schools and systems of philosophy that prevailed then or preceded him that we can really appreciate the glory of the mighty edifice of thought that he erected with all those concepts, developing and refining them to their ultimate culmination in the shining pinnacle of Advaita.

39. Advantages of the Advaitic View-point

What are the advantages of the Advaitic view-point?

First of all, it recognizes the validity of the realizational statements in the Upanishads about the Infinite, Trans-personal, Non-dual, Homogeneous, Absolute Reality, beyond words and thought, which is the source of all relative phenomena and is cognized as the Pure Witness-Self in all.

Second, while it faces some inherent logical difficulty in accounting for the Infinite Non-dual Homogeneous Noumenal Reality appearing as the phenomenal *Many*, the logical difficulties faced by the dualistic systems are far greater and more numerous. (The origin of the universe and its beings is a profound mystery to all schools of

---

110 Swami Vivekananda, who continued and advanced the work started by Sri Shankara, has pointed out and repeatedly emphasized that we can draw upon the infinite potentialities of the Self for our upliftment and achievement on the empirical plane as well.

religio-philosophic thought in the world, as well as to science—not only to the Advaita philosophy.) However, if we remember that all philosophizing is done within the universe in which we find ourselves as living and thinking personalities, Shankara's explanation, by positing Maya and *adhyāsa* as facts of experience, seems to reconcile satisfactorily the One and the Many.

Third, on the phenomenal relative plane, it can broadly accept the different dualistic and idealistic modes of explanation also, since a phenomenon can be accounted for in different ways, as it is we who see it and account for it. In fact, there are several theistic, non-theistic, realistic, and idealistic explanations for the game of the universe which exclude each other, for each considers its own view absolute. However, Shankara recognizes that they all have elaborated in their own way beautiful systems which can very well serve their votaries to reach the goals envisaged by them, for the psychological principle is, "*Yat dhyāyati tat bhavati*—whatever one meditates upon that one becomes or attains." (Cf. *Gītā* 17.3: *Yo yat śraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ.*)

Fourth, it recognises an Absolute Trans-personal Reality, and the phenomenal nature of *Īśvara* as our formulation of the Absolute on the empirical plane, allowing for the conception, worship, love, and contemplation of *Īśvara* under any name and form, as either 'He', or 'She', or 'It', and also without any form, with equal validity. Thus it renders support to all religious strivings and makes for religious harmony.[111] Also, unlike a personal creator-God—who is not a fact of experience universally and is conceived in different ways, and who presents a lot of difficulties with regard to evil and misery in the world—Brahman, as Trans-personal Absolute Reality or Truth,

---

111 Swami Vivekananda, in his letter of 10 June 1898 to Mohammad Sarfaraz Hussain, writes: "Whether we call it Vedantism or any ism, the truth is that Advaitism is the last word of religion and thought, and the only position from which one can look upon all religions and sects with love. We believe it is the religion of the future enlightened humanity." (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* 6.415)

ever untouched by the phenomena produced by Maya, does not present such difficulties. And Brahman is also a fact of intuitive experience at all times to all beings as their Self.

Fifth, it can also harmonize with modern science, as it accepts *satkārya-vāda* (the effect is only the modification of an existing cause—that is, the principle of evolution and not creation on the phenomenal plane), renders explanations of things from the nature of things themselves, and seeks no extraneous entity like a creator-God for explanations.[112]

Sixth, it declares that since Brahman-Atman is an existent Transpersonal Reality or Truth, It can be sought after by everyone, discovered, and realized by one's own efforts, as in the case of scientific truths. There is no special favour for anyone. Truth is equal to all, and open to all universally. It leads to fearlessness, strength, and self-reliance, whereas dependence on an extraneous principle such as a creator-God leads to fear, weakness, and self-abasement—unless such dependence takes the form of surrender to God as a personalization of Truth, through pure love and with a sense of belonging. Hence, the Upanishads advocate the worship of God as one's own higher or real Self, and declare that one who thinks of the worshipped as different from oneself, does not know the Truth; he is like a sacrifical animal to the gods. (*Anyo asau anyo ahamasmi iti na sa veda, paśuḥ eva sa devamam?—Brh. Up.* 1.4.10.)

Seventh, the Advaitic conception does not take away anything from the bhakti attitude, but bhakti finds its real fulfilment in Advaita, when the bhakta loses himself completely in God, and God alone remains. Bhakti becomes more and more intense as one goes nearer and nearer to God, and when the bhakta completely obliterates his ego and separateness, bhakti is at its highest. That is why Sri Ramakrishna says *parā-bhakti* and *parā-jñāna* are the same. Otherwise, by looking on himself as separate from God, or

---

112 Swami Vivekananda often discusses this scientific aspect of Advaita Vedanta; see, for example, 'Reason and Religion', *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume 1, pp. 366–82.

as a part of Him, a bhakta puts a limitation on the omnipresence of God, at least by his thought of separateness; or he implies that God is incomplete without him. Some bhaktas want to keep their separate identity to enjoy the bliss of God. This is, in a sense, a selfish attitude, because they love God for their own enjoyment, and not for His own sake. The true bhakta will say, "Wipe me out, O Lord, and Thou alone reign supreme." This also makes meaningful the repeated declaration of the *śruti* of the identity of Atman and Brahman, and the insistent exhortation to realize this identity through Self-knowledge.

Eighth, by recognizing the oneness and solidarity of all existence and the same Atman existing in all beings, Advaita becomes the greatest sanction and meaningful support for the practice of ethics and morality. It makes for freedom, equality, fearlessness, and love of all beings, as the aspirant sees the same Self in all.

40. Conclusion

Thus Acharya Shankara has given us a very profound and comprehensive interpretation of the Vedanta in his works, which for facility of reference is called the 'Advaita Philosophy' by others. It may not be a perfect system in every way. In this imperfect world, nothing is perfect. But with proper understanding and application, it leads us to the Supreme Reality and meets the needs of all grades of aspirants.

All the great Prophets and Incarnations, Krishna or Christ, Buddha or Mohammed—even God himself—all have come in for criticism. Religion and Science and other systems of thought also have not escaped it. Everything and everyone have had their share, and even the critics themselves have their critics. Then it is little wonder that there should be critics of Shankara and his philosophy. But it may be pleaded that there should be no ignorant, perverse, or sentimental criticisms. A philosophy should be criticized philosophically on the basis of its own concepts—not on those of the critic—against reason and experience, showing where it is inconsistent. Also, the

criticism must be constructive with a view to finding the truth, and not to establishing one's likings and preferences.

It is no exaggeration to say that Sri Shankara was a great spiritual genius with a comprehensive penetrating intellect, breadth of vision, depth of insight, and a daring passion for Truth. He was imbued with an intense reforming zeal for the all-round regeneration of society and establishment of dharma, and this he accomplished on the basis of the highest spiritual philosophy which declares the Oneness of all Existence and the Divinity of humanity.

Indeed, he was *Śaṁ-kara*, the *Karuṇāvatāra* of Shiva, who felt keenly for and worked incessantly to alleviate the threefold miseries of mankind, and lead man to the Supreme Freedom, *Mukti*.

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

OM ŚĀNTIḤ, ŚĀNTIḤ, ŚĀNTIḤ.

Appendix A

Note on Maya and Its Cognates

SRI SHANKARA brings out a few of the different aspects of Maya, using terms which are cognate to it, in verse 108 of *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (See note 28, p. 55). He says:

"*Avidyā* or Maya, called also the *avyakta* (the unmanifested or undifferentiated), is the power of the supreme *Īśvara* (*Parameśa-śakti*). It is without beginning, is constituted of the three *guṇa*s, but transcends their effects, the universe (being itself the source of the cosmos). The existence of this divine power (Maya) is to be inferred from its effects that are perceived through a clear intellect (*sudhīya*), for it is Maya that brings forth the whole universe."

It may be useful to note here that Maya and its twin powers of veiling (*āvaraṇa*) and projecting (*vikṣepa*) are indicated not only directly by those words, but also by the use of different words, according to their effects in different contexts, as shown below:

1. ***Maya* (*philosophical*):** The innate, eternal, indefinable (*anirvacanīya*) universe-manifesting power of the Trans-personal Absolute Brahman, which works spontaneously—just as light shines spontaneously—through its two-fold *āvaraṇa-vikṣepa-śakti*s, to evolve the universe within the frame-work of space-time-causation, without affecting the absolute nature of Brahman.

2. ***Maya* (*theological*):** The wonderful creative power of *Īśvara*, which He controls, and by virtue of which He evolves the universe.

3. ***Maya* (*etymological*):** That which *measures* everything (*mīyate anayā iti māyā*), i.e. that which apparently confines the Infinite Absolute Reality within the limitations of space-time-causation (*deśa-kāla-nimitta*), and makes It appear manifold, finite, and measurable through the senses and mind, by its three *guṇa*s of *sattva-rajas-tamas.*

4. *Prakṛti* (*ontological*): Maya in its creative orientation aspect of projecting the universe (*vikṣepa-śakti*), serving as its material cause, with its constituent three *guṇa*s.

Theologically, *Prakṛti* is also considered as the body of *Īśvara*. Cf. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.10: *"Māyām tu prakṛtim vidyāt māyinam ca maheśvaram; tasya-avayava bhūtaiḥ tu vyāptam sarvam-idam jagat*—Know then that Maya (in its creative orientation) is verily this *Prakṛti*, and that the wielder of Maya is the mighty Lord. This entire universe is pervaded (without any hiatus) by entities which are Its evolutes, like unto the parts of Its body."

Etymologically, *Prakṛti* means that which accomplishes everything: *pra*—abundantly or perfectly; *kṛti*—that which creates or accomplishes, from the root *kṛ*, to do (cf. pro-create).

The word *prakṛti*, philosophically, is an adaptation from the *Sāṁkhya*. In ordinary parlance, *prakṛti* means *svabhāva* or the nature of a thing, or its original unmodified state, as against *vikṛti*, the modified state.

5. *Avyakta* (*ontological*): *Prakṛti* in its unmanifest or undifferentiated state (*avyākṛta*). It is still in the state of subtle cosmic energy or power and not yet materially oriented, when the *guṇa*s (cosmic elemental forces) of *Prakṛti* are in a state of equilibrium. In *Sāṁkhya*, it is also called *pradhāna*, to distinguish it from the *avyakta* of Vedanta, where it represents the power of *Īśvara* or Maya in its *āvaraṇa-śakti* aspect. In ordinary parlance, *avyakta* merely means 'unmanifested', which is applied to *Prakṛti*, *Puruṣa*, *Brahman*, or any entity which is not manifested to the senses or the mind.

6. *Ajñāna* or *Avidyā* (*epistemological*): Maya in its aspect of *āvaraṇa-śakti* acting as *ajñāna* or *avidyā* (metaphysical ignorance or non-knowledge of reality or truth—*a-jñāna*, *a-vidyā*), which veils the Reality and gives rise to the projection of something other than Reality by its *vikṣepa-śakti*. This metaphysical ignorance affects the human mind and obscures the knowledge of Truth. It may be noted that only when our waking personality is covered up by sleep, is the dream-universe projected.

Psychologically, this veiling power of Maya (*āvaraṇa-śakti*) is a statement of fact, as pointed out by Swami Vivekananda in his *Jñāna-Yoga* lectures, and by Acharya Shankara in the introduction to his *Brahma Sūtra* commentary (*Sarvaloka pratyakṣaḥ*) and elsewhere (cf. *Kaṭha Up. Bhā.* 1.3.12), for we see it covers up the understanding of even the wise ones (*Vivek.* 114) and brings about attachment to false ideas and non-truth, so difficult to shake off even when the Truth is intellectually understood.

Āvaraṇa-śakti and *vikṣepa-śakti* are correlated. The projection extends from a subtle to the gross state. The grosser the *vikṣepa* or projection, the grosser becomes the veil or *āvaraṇa*. Both are interdependent. They are the effects of *tamas* and *rajas*; *sattva* makes for equilibrium and steadiness, and regulates their operation. *Sattva* being transparent, when it is predominant in its purest state, it provides the least distorted view of Reality.

Since *ajñāna* as *āvaraṇa-śakti* is at the root of the projection of the universe, sometimes *ajñāna* is treated ontologically as the material cause of the universe in Advaita Vedanta. (See *Vedāntasāra* of *Sadānanda*.)

7. ***Adhyāsa* (*epistemological*):** When, due to the effect of *Ajñāna*, we superimpose our own phenomenal notions of the projections by *vikṣepa-śakti* on the Reality, this superimposition is designated as *adhyāsa* or *adhyāropa*.

8. ***Mithyā* (*epistemological*):** The resultant *wrong knowledge* owing to *adhyāsa* is *mithyā-jñāna* or false knowledge, and the product of such knowledge or the object as conceived by it is *mithyā* (not *Satya*—Truth or Reality). *Mithyā* and Maya are not the same. Maya is *power*, and *mithyā* is our wrong understanding of Reality owing to *adhyāsa* engendered by *ajñāna*, which is the product of Maya.

Appendix B

A Comprehensive List of Works Attributed to Sri Shankara

I ***Bhāṣya Granthas*** **(23 Nos.)**

1. *Brahma Sūtra*
2. *Īśā Upaniṣad*
3. *Kena Upaniṣad (Pada)*
4. *Kena Upaniṣad (Vākya)*
5. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*
6. *Praśna Upaniṣad*
7. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*
8. *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, and also on the *Kārikās* of Śrī Gauḍapāda
9. *Aitareya Upaniṣad*
10. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*
11. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*
12. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*
13. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*
14. *Nṛsiṁhatāpinī Upaniṣad*
15. *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā*
16. *Viṣṇu-sahasra-nāma*
17. *Lalitā-triśatī*
18. *Sanatsujātīya*
19. *Hastāmalaka*
20. *Gāyatrī*
21. *Āpastambhīya Dharma Sūtra*
22. *Sāṁkhya-Kārikā*
23. *Yoga-Sūtra Bhāṣya* (recently found)

II *Prakaraṇa* and *Upadeśa Granthas* (54 Nos.)

(No. of *ślokas* in brackets)

1. *Ajñānabodhinī* [prose]
2. *Advaitānubhūti* [86]
3. *Anātma Śrī-vigarhaṇa* [18]
4. *Aparokṣānubhūti* [44]
5. *Amaru-śataka* [101]
6. *Ātmajñānopadeśa-vidhi* or *Dṛgdarśana-viveka* [*sūtra*]
7. *Ātma-pañcaka* (also known as *Ātma-ṣaṭka*, *Advaita-pañcaka*, *Advaita-pañcaratna*) [6]
8. *Ātma-pūjā* or *Parā-pūjā* [11]
9. *Ātma-bodha* [68]
10. *Ātmānātma-viveka* [prose]
11. *Upadeśa-sāhasrī* [prose-verse]
12. *Eka-ślokī* [1]
13. *Kevalo'ham* [8]
14. *Kaupīna-pañcaka or Yati-pañcaka* [5]
15. *Gurvaṣṭaka* [10]
16. *Carpaṭa-pañjarikā* or *Bhaja-govindam stotra* [17]
17. *Jīvanmukta-ānandalaharī* or *Anubhava-ānandalaharī* [18]
18. *Jñānagaṅgā-śataka* [100]
19. *Tattvopadeśa* [87]
20. *Dhanyāṣṭaka* [10]
21. *Nirvāṇa-ṣaṭka* or *Ātma-ṣaṭka* [6]
22. *Nirvāṇa-daśaka* or *Daśa-ślokī* or *Siddhānta-bindu* [10]
23. *Nirvāṇa-maṅjarī* [12]
24. *Nirguṇa-mānasa-pūjā* [33]
25. *Pañcīkaraṇam* [prose]
26. *Prapañcasāra Tantra* [2464]
27. *Prabodha-sudhākara* [257]
28. *Praśnottaramālikā* [67]
29. *Prātaḥ-smaraṇa-stotra* [4]
30. *Prauḍhānubhūti* [17]

31. *Brahmajñānāvalī-mālā* [21]
32. *Brahmānucintana* or *Ātmānucintana* [29]
33. *Maṇiratnamālā* [32]
34. *Manīṣā-pañcaka* [9]
35. *Māyā-pañcaka* [5]
36. *Mohamudgara* or *Dvādaśa-pañjarikā-stotra* [16]
37. *Maṭha-āmnāya* [65]
38. *Yoga-tārāvalī* [29]
39. *Laghu-vākyavṛtti* [18]
40. *Vākya-vṛtti* [53]
41. *Vākyasudhā* [46]
42. *Vijñāna-naukā* or *Svarūpānusandhāna* [9]
43. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* [581]
44. *Vedānta-keśarī* or *Śata-ślokī* [101]
45. *Bodhasāra* [169]
46. *Śaṅkara-smṛti* [12 Chapters]
47. *Sadācāra-anusandhāna* [56]
48. *Sannyāsa-paddhati* [prose]
49. *Sarva-vedānta-siddhānta Sāra-sangraha* [1006]
50. *Sarva-siddhānta Sangraha* [546]
51. *Sādhanā-pañcaka* or *Upadeśa-pañcaka* [6]
52. *Sāra-tattva-upadeśa* [3]
53. *Svātma-nirūpaṇa* [154]
54. *Svātma-prakāśikā* [68].

III *Stotra-Stuti-Granthas* (76 Nos.) (No. of *ślokas* in brackets)

1. *Acyuta-aṣṭaka* [8]
2. *Acyuta-aṣṭaka* (another version) [9]
3. *Annapūrṇā-stotra* [12]
4. *Ambā-aṣṭaka* [8]
5. *Ardha-nārīśvara-stotra* [9]
6. *Ānanda-laharī* or *Saundarya-laharī* [20]
7. *Ārta-trāṇa-nārāyaṇa-stotra* [18]
8. *Umā-maheśvara-stotra* [13]

9. *Kanaka-dhārā-stotra* [18]
10. *Kalyāṇa-vṛṣṭi* [16]
11. *Kālabhairava-aṣṭaka* [9]
12. *Kali-aparādha-bhañjana-stotra* [17]
13. *Kāśī-pañcaka* [5]
14. *Kāśī-stotra* [9]
15. *Kṛṣṇa-aṣṭaka* [8]
16. *Kṛṣṇa-aṣṭaka* (another version) [9]
17. *Gaṅgā-aṣṭaka* [9]
18. *Gaṅgā-stotra* [14]
19. *Gaṇeśa-bhujanga-prayāta* [11]
20. *Gaṇeśa-pañcaratna* [6]
21. *Gaurī-daśaka* [11]
22. *Govinda-aṣṭaka* [9]
23. *Jagannātha-aṣṭaka* [8]
24. *Tripura-sundarī-aṣṭaka* [8]
25. *Tripura-sundarī-mānasa-pūjā* [127]
26. *Tripura-sundarī-veda-pāda-stotra* [110]
27. *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-aṣṭaka* [10]
28. *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra* [19]
29. *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-varṇamālā* [25]
30. *Daśaślokī-stuti* [10]
31. *Daśāvatāra-stotra* [10]
32. *Devī-catuḥṣaṣṭi-upacāra-pūjā-stotra* [72]
33. *Devī-bhujanga-prayāta* [28]
34. *Durgā-aparādha-bhañjana-stotra* [17]
35. *Dvādaśa-jyotirlinga-stotra* [13]
36. *Navaratna-mālikā* [10]
37. *Narmadā-aṣṭaka* [9]
38. *Nārāyaṇa-stotra* [30]
39. *Pāṇḍuranga-aṣṭaka* [9]
40. *Puṣkara-aṣṭaka* [9]
41. *Bhagavat-mānasa-pūjā* [11]
42. *Bhavānī-bhujanga-prayāta* [17]

43. *Bhavānī-aṣṭaka* [8]
44. *Bhramara-aṣṭaka* or *Bhramarāmbā-aṣṭaka* [9]
45. *Maṇikarṇikā-aṣṭaka* [9]
46. *Mantra Mātṛkā Puṣpamālā* [17]
47. *Mīnākṣī-pañcaratna* [8]
48. *Mīnākṣī-stotra* [8]
49. *Mṛtyuñjaya-mānasa-pūjā* [46]
50. *Yamunā-aṣṭaka* [8]
51. *Yamunā-aṣṭaka* (another version) [9]
52. *Rāma-bhujaṅga-prayāta* [29]
53. *Lakṣmī-nṛsimha-pañcaratna* [5]
54. *Lalitā-pañcaka* [6]
55. *Viṣṇu-pādādikeśānta-stotra* [52]
56. *Vedasāra-śiva-stotra* [11]
57. *Viṣṇu-bhujanga-prayāta* [14]
58. *Śāradā-bhujanga-prayāta* [8]
59. *Śiva-pañcākṣara-stotra* [6]
60. *Śiva-bhujaṅga-prayāta* [40]
61. *Śiva-nāmāvalī-aṣṭaka* [9]
62. *Śiva-pañcākṣara-nakṣatra-mālā* [28]
63. *Śiva-pādādi-keśānta-stotra* [41]
64. *Śiva-keśādi-padānta-stotra* [29]
65. *Śiva-aparādha-bhañjana-stotra* [17]
66. *Śiva-mānasa-pūjā* [5]
67. *Śivānandalaharī* [100]
68. *Ṣaṭpadī-stotra* [7]
69. *Saṅkaṭanāśana Lakṣmī-nṛsiṁha* or *Karuṇārasa-stotra* [17]
70. *Suvarṇamālā-stuti* [50]
71. *Subrahmaṇya-bhujaṅga-prayāta* [33]
72. *Saundarya-laharī* or *Ānanda-laharī* [100]
73. *Hanumat-pañcaka* or *Hanumat-pañcaratna* [6]
74. *Hara-Gaurī-aṣṭaka* [8]
75. *Harimīḍe-stotra* [44]
76. *Hari-nāmāvalī-stotra* [19].

Appendix C

Swami Vivekananda on Sri Shankara

BUT INDIA HAS to live, and the spirit of the Lord descended again. He who declared, "I will come whenever virtue subsides," came again; and this time the manifestation was in the South, and up rose that young Brahmin boy of whom it has been declared that at the age of sixteen he had completed all his writings; the marvellous boy Shankaracharya arose. The writings of this boy of sixteen are the wonders of the modern world, and so was the boy. He wanted to bring back the Indian world to its pristine purity, but think of the amount of the task before him. I have told you a few points about the state of things that existed in India. All these horrors that you are trying to reform are the outcome of that reign of degradation. . . . That was the inheritance which that boy got from the Buddhists, and from that time to this, the whole work in India is a reconquest of this Buddhistic degradation by the Vedanta. It is still going on, it is not yet finished. Shankara came, a great philosopher, and showed that the real essence of Buddhism and that of the Vedanta are not very different, but that the disciples did not understand the Master and have degraded themselves, denied the existence of the Soul and of God, and have become atheists. That was what Shankara showed, and all the Buddhists began to come back to the old religion.

When atheists and agnostics had destroyed the nation again, it was found out that Advaita was the only way to save India from materialism. . . . Again materialism came to the fore, taking the form of licence with the higher classes and superstition with the lower. Then Shankaracharya arose and once more revivified the Vedanta philosophy. He made it a rationalistic philosophy. In the Upanishads the arguments are often very obscure. By Buddha the moral side of the philosophy was laid stress upon, and by Shankaracharya, the

intellectual side. He worked out, rationalised, and placed before men the wonderful coherent system of Advaita.[2]

Shankaracharya had caught the rhythm of the Vedas, the national cadence. Indeed I always imagine that he had some vision such as mine when he was young, and recovered the ancient music that way. Anyway, his whole life's work is nothing but that, the throbbing of the beauty of the Vedas and the Upanishads.[3]

And the great glory of Bhagavan Bhashyakara Shankaracharya is that it was his genius that gave the most wonderful expression to the ideas of Vyasa.[4]

The greatest teacher of the Vedanta philosophy was Shankaracharya. By solid reasoning he extracted from the Vedas the truths of Vedanta, and on them built up the wonderful system of Jnana that is taught in his commentaries. He unified all the conflicting descriptions of Brahman and showed that there is only one Infinite Reality. He showed too that as man can only travel slowly on the upward road, all the varied presentations are needed to suit his varying capacity.[5]

Next in authority is the celebrated *Gītā*. The great glory of Shankaracharya was his preaching of the *Gītā*. It is one of the greatest works that this great man did among the many noble works of his noble life—the preaching of the *Gītā* and writing the most beautiful commentary upon it.[6]

Books cannot teach God, but they can destroy ignorance; their action is negative. To hold to the books and at the same time open the way to freedom is Shankara's great achievement.[7]

---

1 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 Volumes (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1992–97), Vol. 3 p. 265 (Hereafter CW)
2 CW 2.138–39
3 CW 8.278–79
4 CW 4.342–43
5 CW 8.6
6 CW 3.328
7 CW 7.53

Appendix D

Great Assurance by Sri Shankara

FOR THOSE (ASPIRANTS), who through delusion wander about lost in the desert paths of this world of *saṁsāra*, sorely afflicted by the scorching sun-rays of three-fold misery (physical, natural and spiritual), and are athirst for the saving waters of Truth, here is this triumphant message of Shankara, pointing out within easy reach, the blissful Ocean of Nectar, the non-dual Brahman, leading to the cessation of all miseries (based on dualistic notions) and to Spiritual Liberation.

—*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 580

---

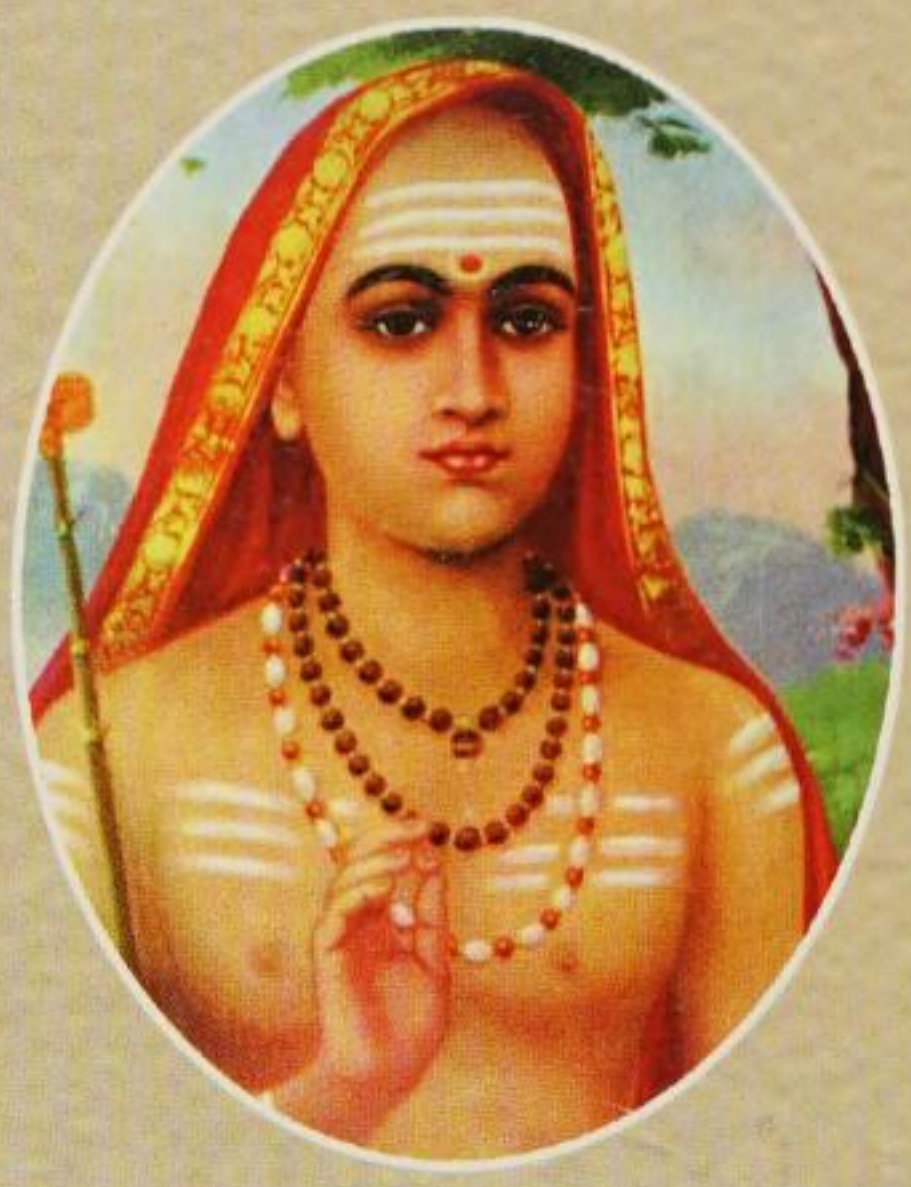
continued from front flap

the *Brahma Sūtras*, and the *Gītā*, and other works like the *Vivekacūdāmani* and the *Upadeśa-sāhasrī*, elucidate the different aspects and tenets of the Advaita philosophy and its practical implications, in simple, non-technical, charming language, both in prose and verse, and show ways and means to the realization of the highest Truth. His numerous beautiful and profound hymns exhort us to devote ourselves to the Lord and to strive for fulfilment in life by realizing the highest Truth.

Shankara was a great illumined sage, philosopher, scholar, and poet; he was also a man of action, a great reformer and organizer, and a stabilizer of society by the resuscitation of ethical and spiritual values. Let us pay our humble homage to this luminous personality of vast universal dimensions, who even now serves as a beacon light of great brilliance to both India and the world.

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, is a reputed writer and scholar. He resides at Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal. Among his many books are the following:

- Om, Gāyatrī and Sandhyā
- VEDANTA—The Science of Integral Reality Vis-à-Vis MODERN SCIENCE
- HINDUISM—The Eternal Dharma



Appreciation for Earlier Editions

A symphony of spiritual philosophy that misses neither note nor beat.

—Mr. E. J. Shearn, Stanford CT, USA

A wonderful book. . . . a historic publication—the product of deep contemplation on the life and teachings of the great Acharya.

—Swami Apurvananda

Most useful when discussing Advaita with others.

—Dr. Raja Ramanna, Chairman, Government Council
Director, National Institute of Advanced Studies

Wonderful. . . . Good reading—very clear and very well organized. The English is excellent. . . . It just flows along lucidly. . . . A clear exposition of Shankara's Vedanta.

—Marie Louise Burke
Author, Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries

The outcome of deep understanding and great appreciation of the Shankara Vedanta. The author evaluates the works of Shankara not only from the scholarly point of view, but treats Shankara as an illumined seer. . . . The work is well-documented; hence serves the purpose of researchers as well.

—Dr. S. P. Dubey, Reader
Joint Secretary, Indian Philosophical Congress

A superb exposition of the marvellous life and work of Shankaracharya . . . I was highly inspired by the clarity of exposition and the scholarly thoroughness with which [the author] unravels the depths of his system. [The author] has thus contributed greatly to the realization of Vedantic Truth in the world at large.

—Mr. L. C. Ims, Nor

A valuable addition to the Advaita philosophy; we are proud to hav

—The Editor, Voice of Shankara, *Ch*

Garland of Letters
HINDUISM Books
Sri Shankaracharya : Life a
07071
817505283X $10.0
07-BL-038